

Precious Seed



A. N. SOMERVILLE, D.D.





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“PRECIOUS SEED”

SOWN IN MANY LANDS.





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A. H. Somerville

PRECIOUS SEED
SOWN IN MANY LANDS.

SERMONS.

BY THE LATE REV.

A. N. SOMERVILLE, D.D.

WITH BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

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PREFATORY NOTE.

WHEN a military general or naval hero dies, we are accustomed to look with interest on the arms which he employed in his warfare.

In the following pages there will be recognised several of the weapons made use of by one who fought the good fight of faith for over fifty years, and who now rests from his labours.

It has been thought that, of the many thousands who heard Dr. Somerville preach at home and abroad, some there might be who would enjoy perusing at their leisure certain of his discourses. The accompanying addresses have accordingly been thrown into print.

The sermons themselves are in many ways unique, like the man who composed and preached them. Though fully written out, they have evidently not been penned with a view to publication, and they are now given to the world in the colloquial and homely form in which they were

delivered. The reader may possibly think there is a lack of variety in the lessons drawn in the sermons, but it must be remembered that Dr. Somerville in passing through many countries had sometimes only one opportunity of declaring his message in a town ; he endeavoured, consequently, in each of his addresses to show forth the whole plan of salvation. The sermons differ in character from those delivered when Dr. Somerville was engaged in ordinary pastoral work.

God grant that, though the voice of His servant be now still, these sermons may yet speak effectually to the hearts and minds of many readers !

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH:

A SHORT reference to the life of the author of these sermons may be of interest.

Alexander Neil Somerville was born in Northumberland Street, Edinburgh, on January 30th, 1813. He was educated chiefly at the High School, and he afterwards passed through the various classes of Edinburgh University. He studied Divinity, Church History, and Hebrew, under Drs. Chalmers, Welsh, and Brunton. The influence of these men, very specially that of Dr. Chalmers, remained with him throughout.

In everything, whether in preaching or organizing, Dr. Somerville was thorough. The thorough man was at one time the thorough boy. In later days he used to refer to the athletic games, long walks, fishing, skating, and riding expeditions indulged in during his boyhood, saying that he believed they had done him good service in strengthening him for after labours. The sanctified "good cheer" of the aged pastor and evangelist had its full representation in the

buoyancy of the young man with his love of fun and the characteristic amusements of youth.

A companion after his own heart was found in the person of Robert Murray McCheyne. These two were indeed bosom friends. In an article entitled "Recollections of Robert McCheyne," written by the late Rev. James Dodds of Dunbar, and published in the *New York Presbyterian* in 1874, the writer says: "His (McCheyne's) chosen and intimate friend at this period was Alexander Somerville, who has long been the useful and honoured minister of Free Anderston Church, Glasgow. These two students seemed literally inseparable. Along with many others, I was often amused at the closeness of their companionship. They sat beside each other in the class-room; they came and went together; they were usually seen walking side by side in the street; or if one of them turned round a corner the other was sure to come in sight a minute after. The one seemed to haunt the other like a shadow, and nothing apparently could separate the two bosom friends. The fact was, they loved each other dearly in the Lord. Natives of the same city, they had been friends in early youth, and having passed about the same time through a profound spiritual experience

they enjoyed spiritual fellowship, and pursued their sacred studies together, with a depth and cordiality of feeling seldom equalled in the annals of human friendship. Many sweet and precious morning hours were by them devoted to the study of the Hebrew Bible and the Septuagint. Much time also did they spend together in prayer and spiritual conversation. In this way did they become, as students and ministers, fervent in spirit, and mighty in the Scriptures."

Strange that one of these young men should have been struck down at the age of thirty, while the other was permitted fully to pass the allotted threescore and ten years ! Though death separated the two companions, their names were still linked together, for in many countries Dr. Somerville was welcomed as having been the friend of McCheyne.

Other companions there were at this time whose fellowship remained all through life—Drs. Horatius and Andrew Bonar, Dr. Laughton, Mr. W. C. Burns, afterwards of China, and others, most of whom have been called home.

Dr. Andrew Bonar, when preaching in connection with the death of his old friend, mentioned that he had found a note written by himself on one of his books to the following effect : " Had a

stroll this afternoon with Robert McCheyne and Alexander Somerville. We walked round Duddingston Loch (near Edinburgh); talked about what we thought God's way with us might be. We sat down on the trunk of a fallen oak tree, and sang, and prayed, and returned home."

Little is known of Dr. Somerville's conversion. Dr. Bonar has told us that at a meeting in Glasgow, at which the late Dr. Henderson of Free St. Enoch's was present, Dr. Somerville, turning to the latter, said, "It was while sitting under your ministry that the light broke upon me in full." That would be when Mr. Somerville was about eighteen years of age, and while he attended Stockbridge Chapel, Edinburgh, where Dr. Henderson was minister.

In December 1835, at the age of twenty-three, Mr. Somerville was licensed as a probationer of the Church of Scotland by the Presbytery of Jedburgh.

After acting for a short time as missionary at Stockbridge, Edinburgh, he, in December 1836, succeeded Mr. McCheyne as assistant to the Rev. Dr. John Bonar of Larbert and Dunipace. There he remained for ten months. Mr. D. C. Macnicol, the present Free Church pastor at Dunipace, writes that some old members of his congregation

tell how Mr. Somerville, on his way from Dunipace to Larbert early on the Sabbath mornings, used to knock at their doors, and call on them to rise and get ready for the service in the house of God.

On November 30th, 1837, the Presbytery of Glasgow ordained Mr. Somerville as minister of Anderston *quoad sacra* Parish, Clyde Street—a street that is to the present day connected in mission work with Free Anderston Church. His first sermon after ordination was from the text, “For Zion’s sake will I not hold my peace, and for Jerusalem’s sake I will not rest, until the righteousness thereof go forth as brightness, and the salvation thereof as a lamp that burneth.”¹

In 1841 Mr. Somerville married Miss Isabella Mirrlees Ewing. A pattern wife and mother she has proved during these many years. The description of the “virtuous woman” found in the last chapter of Proverbs could well be applied to her—“Her children arise up and call her blessed ; her husband also, and he praiseth her.”

How nobly and unselfishly she gave up her husband when the call came to him in later years to enter on the foreign field !

The early as well as the later days of Mr. Somerville were much devoted to evangelistic

¹ Isa. lxii. 1.

effort. In the midst of the Kilsyth revival of 1839 he was an earnest worker. His sermon on the Church of Laodicea, now published, was at that time a great favourite of his own and of his hearers, and was much blessed. In connection with the religious movement, his church in Anderston was open every night, except Saturday, for three months. A few years later, during another revival of religion, it was again open each evening, except Saturday, for eleven months.

On May 18th, 1843, the Disruption took place. Mr. Somerville was a member of Assembly for that year, and walked out with his fellow-protesters from St. Andrew's Church, Edinburgh, to Cannon Mills, to assist in the formation of the Free Church of Scotland. His congregation, with scarcely an exception, adhered to him. His church in Cadogan Street was opened in February 1844.

During the succeeding few years he was despatched on evangelistic or deputy work to various parts of England, Scotland, and Ireland ; and in 1845 he was sent out to Canada to occupy the vacant pulpit of Côté Street Church, Montreal, after which he visited most of the chief cities and towns of Canada, and also several cities in the

United States. In 1848, on account of an affection of the throat, and while a new church was being built, Mr. Somerville went to Palestine, Egypt, Mount Sinai, and Constantinople.

His third church was opened in 1849.

In 1858 Mr. Somerville had much to do in connection with the planning of what is now the National Bible Society of Scotland. Some years afterwards, on more than one occasion, he went through part of the Highlands with Mr. W. J. Slowan, the secretary, for the purpose of forming auxiliaries in connection with the parent society in Glasgow.

Mr. Somerville was secretary and afterwards president of a ladies' society connected with the Free Church, for the maintenance of a mission at Leghorn, under the care of the late Rev. Dr. Stewart.

A scheme for the rescue of young women was originated by him in 1860. More than one good result of this effort came before his notice in the Colonies long afterwards.

Dr. Somerville associated himself with Rev. Dr. Marshall Lang in the practical carrying out of a scheme, originated by Professor Gairdner, then Health Officer of the city, for the systematic visitation of the entire town by the different

congregations, in order to secure a thorough cleansing of the city in advance of the cholera, which then threatened Glasgow.

The Gospel in Spain was for many years a subject of much interest to him. While most ministers take four to six weeks of rest from their congregational labours, Mr. Somerville spent his so-called holiday in hard work in Spain and other countries.

Once before the Revolution of 1868, and five times afterwards, Mr. Somerville visited Spain. This originated in great measure through his becoming acquainted with Manuel Matamoros, the Spanish exile, whom he visited at Lausanne during his banishment. Mr. Somerville loved this man, and after Matamoros' death penned the following lines in his memory :—

“ I little thought, else keen had been my pain,
Those brilliant eyes should beam on me no more ;
That scarcely fifteen moons should wax and wane,
Ere death had sealed them by blue Leman's shore.

“ Dear Matamoros ! No friend have I known
Of soul less soiled with earthliness than thine ;
In chains and exile, brave thy Lord to own,
The victor's wreaths thy martyr temples twine.

“ Loving and lovely, gentle, guileless, pure,
All base alloy thy lofty bosom spurned ;
To lead thy bleeding Spain to Christ for cure,
With life-consuming fire that bosom burned.

“I loved thee, as did those of many a clime—
Thy glorious race on earth seemed but begun.
The Lord ‘does all things well.’ In golden prime
Thou servest now, where shines no setting sun.”

On one occasion, at the annual fair of San Isidro at Madrid in 1869, for hours together, in company with Messrs. L. B. Armstrong and George Lawrence, Mr. Somerville stood up in the midst of a huge crowd, reading out in Spanish, in a loud voice, parts of the New Testament, and afterwards selling the Gospels and other portions of Scripture. That same year he visited Gibraltar, and there had his friendly encounter with the Jewish schoolmaster, referred to at length in the lecture, “What Christianity owes to the Jews,”—a story that God has used to open the hearts of the Jews to hear the words of the stranger. At that time Rev. Mr. Coventry was Presbyterian chaplain to the Highland Regiment stationed on the Rock. Mr. Somerville went to the vestry to see Mr. Coventry just before divine service on the Sunday. The chaplain had donned the gown, and was just about to enter the pulpit, when, on Mr. Somerville appearing, he speedily took off his gown, put it on his friend’s shoulders, and before Mr. Somerville had time thoroughly to grasp the situation he found himself in the pulpit, facing a sea of red coats. On another occasion, 1870,

while at Madrid, he drew up a constitution and a confession of faith for the use of the Protestants there, and in company with Carrasco he personally dealt with each individual who was formally to be received into church membership.

For two months Mr. Somerville's health seriously suffered as the result of his fatigues ; but two years later he again visited Spain, and when in the streets of Saragossa he was stoned. This did not debar him from going again to Spain, now for the fifth time, when he passed on to Portugal, preaching the Gospel wherever he went. In addition to all the toil connected with these visits to Spain, Mr. Somerville worked laboriously at home in behalf of that country, delivering lectures in various cities and towns in the British Isles, in order to awaken interest in Spain and to purchase a site for a church at Madrid.

The mental strain of all this work, in addition to that connected with his congregation, was so severe as to cause Mr. Somerville many days and nights of intense suffering from neuralgic pains in the body ; but though laid aside for a short time, he returned to his work with renewed earnestness. By medical advice he began to read his sermons. His method of doing so, however, was original. The MSS. were written in a book which he

held in his left hand, while with the right he enforced his arguments. But, occasionally, when he specially warmed to his subject, he found himself hampered with "the paper," so he would lay it aside for a few minutes, and preach with both hands at liberty.

In 1874 the memorable visit of Messrs. Moody and Sankey to this country took place. Into the religious movement which resulted, Mr. Somerville threw himself most heartily.

From this time we may say Mr. Somerville entered upon the latter part of his life ; or, as the Rev. J. Stalker of Glasgow puts it, "his second life" ;—a period of only fifteen years, but during that time the labour undergone can scarcely be estimated. God, however, gave him the needed strength for the work he undertook.

In 1874, the Rev. John Fordyce, secretary of the Anglo-Indian Christian Union, now called the Anglo-Indian Evangelisation Society, was looking about for a suitable man to go to India to preach to the English-speaking people there, in connection with the "winter mission" of the society. Meeting Mr. Somerville, on one occasion, hurrying along to an engagement with that characteristic nimble step of his, he spoke to him for a few moments ; "but," to quote Mr. Fordyce's own

words, "these were the beginning of the most remarkable era in a singularly useful life. I said, 'I wish you were fifteen years younger, Mr. Somerville. If you were, I would ask you to go to India.' He at once replied, with a beaming smile, 'They used to say I had two wings. I think I have four now.' I quite understood him. With his two wings he had flown to Spain, etc. ; and now he was ready for a greater flight. I said, 'I shall write.' I did so, and a meeting was arranged, when he gave his hearty consent to go ; but it will be seen that Dr. Somerville was virtually a volunteer for the service of India."

Mr. Somerville arrived at Calcutta on the anniversary of his ordination day, November 30th, 1874.

The mission in India extended to about twenty different cities, as far north as Lahore and Mooltan, and from Calcutta to Bombay, and lasted for over six months. Mr. Somerville found a home in Calcutta in the house of his eldest son. The work among the European population was immediately commenced, and for a month Mr. Somerville laboured in Calcutta, giving two, or even three addresses daily.

Towards the close of his visit there, Mr. Somerville expressed a wish to address the

English-speaking Native population. He was told this would be impossible. Oh, how often was he told in this and other subsequent missions that his proposals were "impossible"! But to him the word impossible had no meaning. Two meetings were held in the original mission premises of Dr. Duff, Cornwallis Square, at which nearly a thousand of the non-Christian community were present—a surprise to many. Perfect decorum prevailed, and close attention was given to the addresses. Since that visit frequent meetings for the Natives have been held by the missionaries, not only in the Institutions, but also in the open air. In almost every city visited by Mr. Somerville in India he had opportunities of preaching the Gospel to hundreds who had never heard of a Saviour. Interpretation was unnecessary, the educated Natives being all well acquainted with the English language. At the close of several of these meetings a representative Native gentleman publicly thanked the speaker for his address. At Allahabad, the mover of the vote of thanks stated, among other things, that they were all greatly obliged to the Sahib for his address; that the people of India were much indebted to the present rulers for what they had done for them. The English had taught

them many things ; but though it was a delicate matter to touch on the relation of governors and governed, he must confess he thought the Natives were often treated very ill. But there was one thing he would say, and it was that they always found the missionaries to be their friends, and that they could draw distinctions.

Again at Mooltan, at the close of a service held in the open air for the Native population, Mr. Somerville, after having preached, publicly baptized a Native who had previously professed his belief in Christianity. The gentleman who politely returned thanks for the address said, in referring to the ceremony just concluded, "Is there not mention in your Bible about being baptized with the Holy Ghost and with fire? We have seen you baptize with water, but if we could see some of the fire we would be more interested." Would that Christians, both in India and elsewhere, evinced more in their life that they had been baptized, not only with water, but with "fire" !

In Bombay, the late Rev. Dr. Wilson gave great assistance by his presence and counsel in the carrying out of the mission. While there Mr. Somerville organized a Young Men's Christian Association, which remains in a flourishing

condition to the present day. He had also, while in that city, an opportunity of addressing the Beni Israel ; and when he delivered his lecture entitled "The Fiery Furnace" (Daniel iii.), in which he argues in favour of the incontrovertible evidences of Christianity, there were among his hearers many Parsee gentlemen of position and education.

From what Mr. Somerville saw of the readiness on the part of the Native population to listen attentively, and with evident interest, to the simple truths of the Gospel, he came away from India powerfully impressed with the feeling that, in connection with our various large mission-stations and Institutions, there should be far more of the preaching element. While approving of the high educational system, he felt assured that mere education, or even the Bible-lessons given in the schools, were not sufficient. What India required in addition was that, in connection with each Institution, there should be one or more earnest ministers of the Gospel, who would give themselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the Word, and devote themselves entirely to preaching the Truth in the open air or in public places, in the cities or neighbourhood. Mr. Somerville also felt that the Gospel was secretly making its way throughout India ; that many

there were who believed in Christ, but who were afraid to confess Him. Accordingly, he used to urge his Native hearers to come out bodily and boldly for the Lord Jesus ; to create a public opinion in their own favour, and so to make it impossible for them to be crushed by the tyranny of caste. He was of opinion that some day India would suddenly wake up, and that thousands would rise to confess Christ.

Mr. Somerville went to India at the age of sixty-one. When a young man entering on his ministry, he wished to give himself to missionary work in that country. He was full of Christian zeal, and longed to preach the Gospel to the heathen. He consulted a leader in the church, an authority on Indian missions. The advice he received was to go and "study chemistry," to enable him to teach it at one of the Institutions. A young minister, hungering after souls, to teach chemistry ! So India was given up for the time being ; but God had not forgotten the prayers of His young servant that he might be blessed to India, and in His own good time He sent him to that dark region to preach the glorious Gospel, and to tell of the unsearchable riches of Christ.

Canada, and a few cities in the States, were

visited in the American Centennial year, 1876. The primary object of this mission was to convey the greeting of the Free Church General Assembly to the first General Assembly of the newly united Presbyterian Churches in Canada, held at Toronto. In going over part of the Dominion, and preaching in a number of different places, Mr. Somerville met with many who had heard him preach during his former visit, thirty-one years before, and who were not only able to quote the text, but could mention the heads of the sermon and the illustrations. Among other cities visited was London, Ontario, where a service was held in St. Andrew's Church, to which Mr. Somerville had been "called" in 1845.

Little or no reference has been made to the congregational work carried on by Mr. Somerville. Who can tell of it? The sermons, the evangelistic prayer meeting and open-air addresses, the young men's and young women's classes, the kitchen and district meetings, the visitations, the students' meetings in his house, the ministerial prayer meetings in the church, it is impossible to make mention of here. Special reference, however, may be made to the young men's class held on Sunday evenings. How many men in various parts of the world, and in different positions in

life, have spoken to Mr. Somerville, reminding him of their attendance at his class, and testifying to the benefit received from his Biblical instruction ! Who can estimate the good done during these forty years of congregational ministry ?

But now a "call" came to Mr. Somerville—a call of an extraordinary character. It consisted of a request, on the part of the Glasgow United Evangelistic Association, that he should renounce his pastorate, and devote his future years to the "regions beyond." The terms of the commission were—"That he should be left unfettered as to when, where, and how he should work." There were certainly no home-committee hamperings here ! But the Association knew and could trust their man.

The proceedings before the Free Presbytery of Glasgow on February 7th, 1877, will long be remembered by those who were present. There was hardly a dry eye in the house when Mr. Somerville, at the end of his statement, added that his mind in the whole matter was expressed in those words of the Psalmist, "I will go in the strength of the Lord GOD : I will make mention of thy righteousness, even of thine only. O God, thou hast taught me from my youth : and hitherto

have I declared thy wondrous works. Now also when I am old and greyheaded, O God, forsake me not ; until I have shewed thy strength unto this generation, and thy power to every one that is to come.”¹

The University of Glasgow bestowed on Mr. Somerville the honorary degree of D.D. on May 2nd, 1877 ; and on the following day, at the age of sixty-four, Dr. Somerville set out to fulfil his world-wide commission, Australasia having been chosen as the first field for operation.

About forty separate localities in Australia, New Zealand, and Tasmania were visited. As an example of the good effect of his labours in promoting unity among all Christians, reference may be made to a united communion service held, at the close of his mission, in the large Town Hall of Melbourne, over which Dr. Somerville, at the request of fifty ministers of all denominations, was called upon to preside,—a fitting conclusion to his work in these Colonies.

It was a wonderful sight to behold over three thousand persons gathered together under one roof, silently to testify to their love for a crucified, but now ascended Saviour. The impression produced on the mind of a beholder cannot be described. At

¹ Psalm lxxi. 16-18.

one time it was feared that Dr. Somerville would not be able to be present. The incessant toil during the previous sixteen months, and the effects of severe sea-sickness, had prostrated him, and for nearly a month he passed through a severe time of suffering ; but, at the cost of extra pain, he ventured to preside, and even to give a short address.

In 1879 Dr. Somerville proceeded to France, with the primary intention of reaching the English-speaking residents in Paris. At the close of the mission, Dr. Somerville addressed, by means of an interpreter, meetings for the French people in all the *salles évangéliques* (at that time twenty-four in number) of Rev. R. W. McAll, of whom and of whose work Dr. Somerville had the highest opinion.

The missions of the Methodists, under the Rev. Mr. Gibson, of the Baptists, and of Miss De Broen at Belleville, were visited in a similar manner.

From this time Dr. Somerville began his extensive continental work. It commenced in this way. An old Scottish nurse, living with an Edinburgh family at St. Servan, Brittany, urged on her mistress to invite Dr. Somerville to the town. Dr. Somerville knew nothing of the family

or of the locality, but he was led by God to accept the invitation. Meetings were accordingly held for the English people in a casino there. The French population, however, attracted no doubt by the singing, began first by standing at, then inside, the door, and finally they crowded in to such an extent that the English hearers were disturbed. The French people were told that this could not be allowed, but they were asked if they would like a *conférence* to be held in French for themselves. Immediately there was a loud chorus of "*Oui! oui!*" Accordingly, after the English mission was concluded, French services were commenced. These proved most successful. One of Mr. McAll's staff came from Paris to interpret. The good influence of this effort remains to this day. French services have, since then, been frequently held; mothers' meetings have been instituted, and many of the soldiers have been reached, and have been presented with Gospels and Testaments. But all this work has been carried on in the face of much priestly opposition, those attending the Protestant services being refused the communion.

The river now started, flowed on, ever increasing in size and strength. After returning from a three weeks' mission in Jersey, Dr. Somerville

next visited Rennes and Angers ; and at Nantes, the mayor, having granted the use of the large theatre holding three thousand people, a crowded meeting was held. Later, Nismes, in the south of France, was reached, where for nights together, in the casino, large meetings for the French people took place. Nothing like this had ever occurred before at Nismes. Since that time *réunions populaires* have been held in various Departments of France ; but ten years ago they were little known outside of Lyons, Paris, and Marseilles. At Marseilles many seamen heard him preach. Some of these, a short time afterwards, when in Glasgow, waiting till their ship should be ready to sail, asked for Dr. Somerville, and about thirty of them were invited to his house to supper, when they were addressed and asked to join in the singing of hymns.

Dr. Somerville returned to Scotland to find the new church in University Avenue opened, and the congregation worshipping in it under the pastoral care of the Rev. J. M. Sloan.

The Italian mission was carried out during four months in 1880. Referring to the services held in Florence, the late Rev. Dr. Stewart of Leghorn—a man well acquainted with Italian spiritual life—wrote, in a paper entitled *A Voice*

from Italy: "I was present at the first conference in the large theatre, and was much moved by the strangest sight I had ever seen in Italy. That an audience of three thousand persons should have listened with the most marked decorum, and with intent interest, for two hours to a most earnest Gospel exposition, delivered by a foreigner, through an interpreter, was a thing I could not have believed unless I had seen it; and, in common with other friends present, I gave glory to God that such a change had come over the Florentines, and that the fierce bigotry of a quarter of a century ago had given way to so complete toleration." In another issue of the same paper, he wrote as follows: "In my own estimation, if Dr. Somerville's visit had no other result than to demonstrate to all pastors, missionaries, and laymen, who have the spread of Christ's kingdom in Italy at heart, the possibility of gathering thousands together to hear the Gospel preached, without fear of disturbance or ill-treatment, it would have been invaluable. He has had the courage to do what no man since 1860 has ever attempted, and has set an example which it is to be hoped will be eagerly followed by those who stately labour in this country. Humanly speaking, much of his success depended on the

entire absence of controversy from his addresses, which were rich in Gospel truth."

In Rome seven opportunities were afforded Dr. Somerville of addressing large companies of the citizens. Though incredible difficulties were thrown in the way, the Gospel prevailed. No disturbance ever occurred here. Perhaps this may have been partly due to the surprising number of *gens d'armes* and police that the authorities thought necessary to send to the theatre. The vestibule was described by a friend as being like a guard-room, while the street outside was thickly posted. But the services of the police were never required.

While at Naples, before his mission began, Dr. Somerville climbed Vesuvius for the fourth time in his life!

At Palermo in Sicily the opposition was very strong. On one occasion, when, seemingly by pre-arrangement, there was a scanty attendance of police, and when a large number of young men were present, a kind of uproar occurred. Dr. Somerville was afterwards told that people in the *platea* of the theatre had been on the point of throwing cushions at him. Nothing daunted, Dr. Somerville continued his work there, and had in all four large public theatre services.

In Leghorn Dr. Somerville had two crowded meetings in the theatre, which held 1,600 to 2,000 people. At the first meeting there was a large number unable to gain admission, the doors being shut, as the theatre was full. The lieutenant of police, however, opened the door, though urged not to do so, his excuse being that as "admission was free," it was his business to let people in, whether the place was full or not. Accordingly, those at the door, being unable to hear, made a noise. The service, however, was continued to the end. The police, to excuse themselves, made much of the disturbance, and said another meeting could not be held. The Prefect of the Department, hearing of the disturbance, sent for Dr. Somerville and the *Questore* (i.e., head of police). After the case had been placed before him, the Prefect declared, in the presence of the *Questore*, that he would make his superior authority felt, and that as the rationalists of Leghorn met as they chose, he would take care that the evangelicals should not be impeded, and that he would protect Dr. Somerville's meetings in the theatre, even if he ordered out two companies of soldiers to do it. The *Questore* carried out the order given him, and the second and last meeting passed off with perfect decorum.

So ended the Italian mission.

It is impossible here to enter into detail with regard to the subsequent missions to the Continent and elsewhere.

Germany and Russia were visited in 1881. While Dr. Somerville was in St. Petersburg the Czar was assassinated. This political event made the holding of public meetings for Russians impossible ; still, he had several opportunities of addressing companies of English and Americans, Germans, Swedes, and Jews.

In 1881-82 Dr. Somerville returned to Germany, confining his attention chiefly to the southern portion.

In 1882-83, for nine months, Dr. Somerville travelled over a large portion of South Africa, engaging in evangelistic work in Natal, Orange Free State, the Diamond Fields, Lovedale, the Transkei, and other places in Cape Colony, reaching all classes of the community and many nations, *e.g.*, English, Dutch, Jews, Zulus, Kaffirs, Fingoes, and Bechuanas. In memory of this effort in South Africa, a mission, founded in the east of Cape Colony shortly after he left the country, has been called "Somerville." Strange that Drs. Love and Macfarlane, predecessors of Dr. Somerville in Free Anderston Church, should

also have missions called after them in South Africa !¹

At the conclusion of this African campaign, while at Worcester, Dr. Somerville had a very serious illness, which prostrated him—a result of the constant strain connected with travelling and preaching. People sometimes seemed to imagine that Dr. Somerville was made of cast iron, and that he never suffered or felt fatigue. Many a weary night he spent, on land and at sea, racked with pain. Very frequently he passed most of the night sitting in a chair, unable to lie in bed. He was also a “shocking” sailor, and was always a martyr to sea-sickness. He used to wonder that Paul, in describing his hardships, never included sea-sickness !

In the winter of 1885-86 a mission to Greece was entered upon. Thereafter the region of the Seven Churches in Asia was visited.²

Thence, passing to Constantinople, Bithynia, and Thessalonica, Dr. Somerville had opportunities of addressing, not only English audiences, but also congregations of Armenians, Greeks,

¹ Lovedale and Macfarlane.

² See “The Churches in Asia. Extracts from the Home Letters of Rev. A. N. Somerville, D.D., from the Region of the Seven Churches.” J. and R. Parlane, Paisley.

Turks, Germans, French, and both German and Spanish Jews.

In 1886 Dr. Somerville was unanimously elected Moderator of the Free Church General Assembly, the highest honour that his church could confer on him. His opening address on "Evangelization for the World," and his closing sermon on "Thankfulness," were characteristic of the man.

During his term of office, 1886-87, at the desire of a large number of brethren from the north, the General Assembly requested him to visit, as Moderator, the Highlands and islands of Scotland: He accepted. The work occupied his attention for ten months, and during that time he preached in one hundred and eighty-nine localities. Driving for miles in the open air, holding services at different places during the day, and preaching again at night, or sailing over our western seas during a Scottish winter, was trying work.

No sooner did Dr. Somerville finish his duties as Moderator, than, at the request of the Free Church General Assembly, and in harmony with the objects of the Glasgow United Evangelistic Association, he set out, in the autumn of 1887, for Eastern Europe, to preach to Jews and Gentiles alike. At his now advanced age this mission

told very severely upon him. Still, the amount of work he was able to go through would have put many a younger man to shame. The intense cold, the fatigues of travelling, the oppositions of authorities both ecclesiastical and civil, and the difficulties connected with arrangements, can hardly be credited. The regions visited on this occasion were Austria, Bohemia, Moravia, Hungary, Transylvania, Servia, Roumania, and South Russia.

One chief object of this enterprise was to reach the Jews. He accomplished this, not only indirectly, for many hundreds of Israelites attended his public services, but also directly, for on several occasions he invited them by placard to come and hear him tell "What Christianity owes to the Jews." This address forms one of the series now published. These special Jewish meetings were always largely attended, and the hearers frequently testified to their hearty appreciation of the speaker's words by breaking out into applause.

At the conclusion of this mission Dr. Somerville visited Rabinowitz, in Kischineff, South Russia. He came away forcibly impressed with this wonderful man, and with his devotion to the Cross of Christ.

These continental missions have demonstrated, among other things, what can be done by one man, sometimes in the face of seeming impossibilities, and even by one not speaking the languages of the countries through which he passes. One of the objects of the missions was, by remaining but a short time in one place, to give opportunity to the citizens of many towns of hearing the plain and simple Gospel. A single individual could not be expected to accomplish much, but Dr. Somerville considered himself more in the character of a pioneer opening up the way for others to follow. The readiness of the people in all countries to listen to the Gospel was amazing, and in each place the tide of interest always rose, the final meetings being usually the best attended and the most remarkable. No matter where the Word was preached, and to whom, the general experience was that everywhere the people, Jews or Gentiles, Greeks or Turks, were attracted, and in many ways they evinced their appreciation of what had been said to them. Where opposition or hindrance occurred, with few exceptions, it was occasioned by Christ's professing people. Those in civil authority gave way before Dr. Somerville. His aged appearance, winning countenance, and keen, true eye used to

disarm them. They saw, too, that he was a man who did not come for worldly gain or to stir up political strife, and that he could not be easily set aside. Dr. Somerville was a man of indomitable courage. He never gave in. He used to admire the description by a writer of a man who "rode upon anything, leaped over everything, and stuck at nothing"! The character of his preaching was purely evangelical. Never was any controversial point touched upon, and names and words were avoided that might have roused prejudice.

Dr. Somerville, in his continental missions, always made use of the method of interpretation. It has often been a matter for wonder that he was able to hold the attention of his audiences when addressing them through another. There was seldom any difficulty in doing so. Interpreters were found in all localities who did their part well. Dr. Somerville always tried to get a native who knew English to act as translator. He found that the people preferred to hear their own tongue properly spoken. Very short sentences were used, nay, sometimes only portions of sentences were employed, and, in addition, there was so much action in the preaching of Dr. Somerville that frequently the audience under-

stood what he said before the interpreter had time to explain.

Dr. Somerville's words have been translated publicly into French, German, Dutch, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, Swedish, Greek, Armenian, Turkish, Arabic, Judeo-Spanish, Maráthi, Kaffir, Zulu, Sesuto, Serolong, Bechuana, Maori, Gaelic, Bohemian, Hungarian, Servian, and Jargon.

The missions were undenominational. Dr. Somerville—the old minister—always sought the presence, assistance, and sympathy of his ministerial brethren, and thus united effort on the part of the ministers was to a certain extent effected. The plan was adopted of holding general meetings in public buildings, halls, etc. In this way larger audiences could be addressed, and many people were induced to attend who would not, nay, could not, have shown face at a religious meeting held in a church. Dr. Somerville made extensive use of the service of praise. In all his missions he was accompanied by a member of his family, or by a suitable companion, who assisted him in many ways, but whose chief duty it was to lead the singing. In almost every town, choirs—and these occasionally were composed of over fifty members—were trained to sing the undenominational hymns compiled by Mr. Sankey. In

foreign lands the hymns were translated into the various languages. Everywhere the singing was hearty, and was a feature of the different enterprises. The sheets on which the hymns were printed were usually given away at the last service of a mission, and they acted the part of tracts in carrying the Gospel to many a family. Dr. Somerville laid great emphasis on the singing being lively, and being characterized by great expression and distinctness of verbal enunciation.

The Free Church of Scotland had no more loyal adherent than Dr. Somerville, yet he never hesitated to join cordially with brethren of other denominations in Christian work. This characteristic was recognised by all. As proof of it, he received a hearty invitation to address the Assembly of the Church of Scotland in May of this year, 1889, on the subject of the Jews, and in connection with the Jubilee of the Jewish Committee. What a reception was granted him at that Assembly! To witness the whole body of ministers and elders rise to their feet to welcome the aged minister and evangelist, who had not entered their courts since the Disruption year, was a sight to touch the hearts of all present, his own particularly! Some there were in the hall

that day, white-haired and bent with age, whose thoughts must have fled back to a time, forty-six years before, when they saw Dr. Somerville quit the Assembly of 1843. Then he was the young, black-haired minister of Anderston. Now their eyes rested on the world's old missionary, who had come to encourage his fellow-workers in the cause of Israel's conversion.

Though now he felt his limbs less active than formerly, Dr. Somerville thought he would like to meet once more with some of his brethren in the Highlands. Accordingly, in the summer, three months before he died, he passed through parts of Perthshire and Argyllshire, including Mull, visiting twenty-six places. The last service of all his evangelistic missions was held at Inverary on Sabbath, 21st July.

After his return from Eastern Europe, and when he had given up preaching in Glasgow pulpits, he became a frequent hearer in Free Anderston Church, where he would sit close to the pulpit, or at Communion services by the side of his colleague, the Rev. Thomas Adamson. It was a pleasant sight to look at those two men, sitting together at the Lord's Table, like father and son in the Master's service ; and, indeed, no one could have shown filial regard more sweetly than did

the junior pastor towards his senior in ministerial office.

Dr. Somerville was notably a man of prayer, because of his great belief in the power of prayer. He used to tell us how, in early youth, he often walked from his home in Malta Terrace, Edinburgh, to Corstorphine to pray in solitude and quietness there, for his future work. He believed that these prayers, then offered, had fulfilment in after years in his missionary journeyings. For some time during his early pastoral labours he went daily to his church, to speak to any that might wish to converse with him on spiritual matters. After finishing with the inquirers, he used to lock himself into the church, and walk up the passages, reading the names of the occupants of the pews, and praying for them individually. At family worship, absent members of the household were always prayed for by name. No matter where he was, he never omitted to ask a blessing before meals. This fact occasionally led to an introduction to Christian fellow-travellers. Many will remember how, when Moderator of Assembly, he prayed at the opening service each morning in turn for a new portion of the globe with its various countries, states, departments, counties, and shires, till the whole world had

been mentioned in prayer. The very islands of the sea were individually and by name remembered. It was then wondered how he could recollect so many names, but the truth was it had been his habit for many years to make use of a pocket atlas—his prayer-book, as he called it—when at his private devotions, till latterly he was able to dispense with the text altogether, and to trust entirely to memory.

The Bible was the constant companion of both his leisure and busy hours. He never tired of reading it, and he was always finding new things in it. He was himself a concordance. Ask him where a certain text was, and he would give you the chapter and usually the verse where it was to be found. He never read the Book, whether in the original or in English, without pen in hand. At family worship the Bible was expounded both morning and evening and its truths made interesting to children and servants. Dulness in worship, whether public or private, was unknown.

He was a man who carefully prepared for every public address. In the early days, when pastor of a congregation, and when two or three sermons had to be written for each Lord's Day, the order was given to the servant, after family

worship on Saturday morning, "Now, if the Queen calls to-day, tell her I am sorry I cannot see her till Monday!" Even when on his various missions he had occasion to preach the same sermon frequently, he never ventured to come before his audience without careful preparation. When he began his address he had always the appearance of a man with an important message that he was bound to deliver with all earnestness. He looked, too, as if he fully believed what he told his hearers.

In his home life Dr. Somerville was delightful. Everything around him was cheery. The more of his family circle or relations he had beside him, the happier he seemed. He always gave hearty welcome to his children and grandchildren, and the last words at departure usually were, "Well, when are you coming back again?" He was one of large heart, and could enter fully into the pursuits and interests—whether connected with ministerial, medical, or scientific subjects—of those near to him. Not only was he beloved by his family, but all who came in contact with him seemed to be affected by his very presence. Dr. Somerville was much moved by kindness, and never forgot those who helped him, or were friendly to him.

Dr. Somerville was blessed with remarkably good health, and with a strong constitution. A curious medical fact about him was that his pulse ordinarily beat at from forty-six to forty-eight per minute. Possibly to this circumstance he in great measure owed his long life. After the excitement of an evening meeting he would return home considerably exhausted, but having changed his raiment he would sit down before the fire, book and pencil in hand, and quietly read perhaps such a work as Butler's "Analogy." Soon the pulse would regain its former tranquillity, and before retiring to rest the nervous excitability had greatly decreased. But the robust frame could not hold out for ever. The last sermon was delivered on August 11th, in connection with the death of Dr. Horatius Bonar. The week before Dr. Somerville died he took part at the communion service in the United Presbyterian Church at Kirn, where he was staying. Four or five days previous to his death he began to fail. The day before he died he had sufficient strength to come up from Kirn to Glasgow. That evening he rallied, and though during the night there were signs indicative that the end might possibly be soon approaching, he was able to converse in the morning with those

around him in his usual cheery style. But at noon of that day, September 18th, a sudden movement caused, possibly, the rupture of a blood-vessel. In a moment he was unconscious, and in little more than a minute his spirit was in heaven. His wife, his three sons, and a son-in-law, were all present as he passed away.

Thus ended the earthly life of one of God's faithful servants. He died at the age of seventy-six, in harness, ripe, and "full of days." Of him it might be said as of old Jehoiada, "he did good in Israel, both toward God, and toward his house."

W. F. SOMERVILLE, M.D.

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I.

THE CHURCH OF LAODICEA.

REVELATION iii. 14-22.

THE Epistles to the seven Churches of Asia are the latest of the inspired letters in the New Testament. The Lord Jesus had been about sixty-three years in glory when He appeared to John in Patmos, and commissioned him to bear in his now aged hands these Divine messages to the Churches.

These Epistles are distinguished from the others of the New Testament by their being addressed by the Lord Jesus to the Churches, not indirectly, as on other occasions, in the name of Paul, or Peter, or John, but directly and in His own name as the First and the Last, the Living One, He that was dead, and behold He is alive for evermore. Nothing can have occurred to change Christ's mind towards His Church on earth since these Epistles were written. As we hear them read, we may suppose ourselves to be listening to Christ's own voice, and to be following Him with our eyes, as He moves now from heart to heart among us.

The Epistle to the Church of the Laodiceans is the last of the seven, and is marked by two peculiarities. In it we find : (1) that the condition of the Church of the Laodiceans was more offensive and perilous than that of any of the others ; (2) that to none of the seven Churches did the Lord Jesus address Himself in words of such tenderness and wonderful promise as to this one.

The contrast between these two peculiarities will strike us as we proceed.

It is to the *Church* of the Laodiceans, let it be remembered, that Christ speaks,—that is, to those who are professing believers ; and it is to such we shall address ourselves now.

Let us notice :

I. *The Complaint.*—“ I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot : I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth. Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing ; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.”

It is to be noticed that the Church of the Laodiceans was the only one of the seven in which the Lord Jesus saw nothing to commend. Even in Sardis, there were a few names which had not defiled their garments ; but Laodicea was like a dreary wilderness in which there was not a blade

of cheerful herbage to relieve the eye of the beholder. Yet the Lord does not complain that the people had renounced the Christian profession, and had returned to the worship of stocks and stones; that they had relapsed into vice or immorality; that they had renounced any of the vital truths of Christianity; or had become lax in exercising discipline on notorious offenders; or were torn by internal dissensions. He does not specify any neglect of Church ordinances, nor blame them for forsaking the assembling of themselves together. He admits that they were not "cold." And as for the Laodiceans themselves, when they contemplated their Church, the size of their congregations, the character of their people, their ministers, office-bearers, services, and gifts, and the symmetry of all their arrangements, they were filled with admiration. "What is there any more that is lacking with us? Our Church condition is complete. We know not what improvement could be suggested to us. We are 'rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing.'" And yet this Church, which in the eyes of its members seemed the brightest gem in the Redeemer's crown, is declared by the Redeemer Himself to be fit only to be cast out and trodden under foot. It was true that they had external religion in perfection, but then external religion was all their religion. And what is the Saviour's estimate of merely outside religion, of religion that is devoid

of inward and spiritual life? “I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot. *I would thou wert cold.*” Why does our Saviour make use of this strong expression? Is it because He ever views with approbation coldness in religion? Certainly not. He intends simply to show the offensiveness, danger, and injurious influence of those who have a form of godliness, but who are destitute of its power; who, while they make a profession of religion, give their heart all the while to the world.

These false professors are of all persons the most difficult to arouse to concern about their own salvation. Jesus tells us that the publicans and harlots go into the kingdom of heaven before the Pharisees.

They are, besides, pernicious in the highest degree in their influence on others. Like the fig tree planted in the vineyard, which, while it bore no fruit, exhausted the soil so that nothing could grow in its vicinity, these worldly-minded professors cast a blight on all with whom they come in contact. They may be characterized as manufacturers of infidels, and the first examples of their success will probably be their own sons and daughters, their wives, and servants. Such is likely to be the result of a combination of religious profession and an unholty and worldly life.

Then we know that no foes are so dangerous as those who assume the appearance of intimate

allies. These, and false friends are the traitors who betray the citadel, as Judas betrayed Christ with a kiss.

And yet again, does not Christ tell us that none will inherit so terrible a doom as the unsanctified professor. It will be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for Capernaum with all its synagogues, which yet rejected Christ when He came to it.

But this is not all. The risen Lord goes on, "Because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth." We can scarcely light on a passage of the New Testament more awful in meaning than this. Observe, it is not anger that is the emotion expressed by these words. It is something more terrible than anger. It is loathing and disgust. "I will spue thee out of my mouth." Think of men being contented with a religion which moves the Lord Jesus to loathing!¹

Is it not most affecting to observe how entirely people may deceive themselves as to their spiritual condition in the sight of God? These Laodiceans were under the belief that all was right with them, whereas Jesus intimates that everything was wrong. They thought that they were winding their way upwards along the narrow path that leads to life, whereas He beheld them with pity as they were

¹ Comp. Lev. xviii. 28.

streaming down the broad way that leads to destruction. They imagined that they were objects of complacency and delight to the Lord, at the moment when the Lord could scarce look at them for loathing. They were expecting to receive from Him a crown of glory, while Christ was saying that if they continued as they were, He must spue them out of His mouth!

A man may be wrapped, ay, encased, in the strong conviction of his spiritual superiority to others, and yet his condition may really be the most offensive of all. He may be dreaming that he lies at the door of Paradise, whereas he may be asleep at the very gate of Hell. It is indeed startling to observe how close a resemblance to spiritual life there may be in professors of religion, while the soul in reality may be dead. It is recorded that in the year 1775 a Greenland whaler found himself surrounded by ice that put him in great peril. He remained in perplexity through the night, during which there had been commotion in the sea, and in the morning he was surprised to observe at some distance another ship that had come within hail during the darkness. Anxious to know who the new-comer might be, he made signals of inquiry. To his astonishment, no answer was returned. "Have out one of the boats," he cried, and leaping in with some of his crew, he hailed her again as he came near; but not a man could be seen on deck, at

the helm, or in the shrouds. Meanwhile, the boat gliding alongside, the captain saw, through one of the port-holes, a man sitting at a table with a book before him; but though spoken to, he did not turn his head. The boatmen soon scaled the ship's side, and rushing down into the room below, they found that the man was—*dead*; that he was frozen to death. The other seamen they discovered frozen in their berths, and on the cabin floor. On examining the book, it proved to be the log-book of the ship, the last entry on the page being dated 1762. For thirteen years that ship had been swung backwards and forwards by the currents of the cold sea with these mockeries of life on board!

Ah! have we not had congregations where, from the captain or minister downwards, all resembled the inanimate crew of that hapless ship, having a name to live, while all, or well-nigh all, were dead. Oh, deal faithfully with yourselves! Names, forms, professions, appearances, observances, things outward, will not avail. Let me ask you, Have you been awakened to a sense of your guilt and danger? Have you discovered that you are undone? Have you been brought to repentance? Have you ever sought the Lord Jesus in earnest? Have you found Him? Do you know what finding Him means; or what it is not to find Him? Have you been converted to God? Have you given your heart to Christ? What single token could you

point to, that you have undergone that great change, without which, Christ tells us, we cannot see the kingdom of God? Do you love Christ? Is He precious to you? What is the main object of your life? Is it the glory of God? Are you living to God; and walking in faith, purity, and holiness? These are plain questions, which it would be salutary to put to yourselves. Remember that Christ did not die that men should assume a mere religious profession. He died that the dead might be made alive, that we should become branches of the Living Vine, and members of His body. He will have it that the juices of the vine-stem should penetrate to the extremity of the branches, and that the blood which circulates through Christ's own heart should flow into the smallest of His members. Is it not one reason why the unconverted world slumbers on to its doom, that Christ's professing people are neither cold nor hot, and that those who should be the salt of the earth, frequently are little else than salt which has lost its savour,—salt from which all saline pungency is gone?

II. *The Counsel.*—“I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eye-salve, that thou mayest see.”

I have shown you what the peculiar emotion was

which is denoted in Christ's words ; not anger, but something more dreadful—loathing. Yet see how the Lord Jesus gets over His feeling of disgust, and presents Himself to these people as if He were dealing with them for the first time, saying to them, with His heavenly voice, “ I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich.” He does not wait till the six Churches had interceded with Him to pardon their erring sister. He does not wait till the Laodiceans had put on the sackcloth of repentance, and implored His forgiveness. He does not wait till they had sent entreaties to Him to visit them, till they had laid aside their lukewarmness, and had amended their ways. No, while yet they continued in all their offensive pretentiousness, He comes to them with compassion and tenderness in His voice, and says, “ I counsel thee to buy of me gold.”

You remember that when the Saviour was with us on earth He was wont to employ the language of parable, as for example when He said, “ The kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchantman, seeking goodly pearls ; who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it.” It seems to me that the Lord Jesus, after His long absence in heaven, resumes His old method of address, and likens Himself to a merchantman, who had come to the market-place or bazaar of Laodicea, and having hired a stall for the day, had laid out on

the bench before Him His costly wares for sale,—fine gold, white raiment, precious ointment; and was counselling the people to buy. Nay, so anxious is the Great Merchantman that His goods should be disposed of, that, leaving His stall for the moment, He goes up to one, who with portly step is making his way through the crowd, and gently laying His hand on his shoulder, softly says, “Friend, could I have a word with you? Will you please come this way? I have something of much importance to communicate,—‘I counsel thee to buy of me gold.’” But perhaps you would not wonder though the citizen should refuse to purchase gold. First of all, he would stand off, wondering that the stranger should have ventured to confer with him. And again, it is not every one who is wishing to buy gold; certainly it is not every one who is able to do so. Where could I find the money to buy gold? It will not surprise me should the citizen decline.

Ah! there is no fear of not being rich enough to buy this gold. It is certainly not poverty that can prevent your possessing it. The Great Merchantman is not seeking money, or anything else, as the price for His gold. “Thou art wretched, and miserable, and *poor*: . . . I counsel thee to buy.” The truth is, the man whom the Great Merchantman is addressing is on the verge of bankruptcy, though he knows it not. In a few days his name as an insolvent will be posted in the Exchange, and all he has

will be brought to the hammer in liquidation of his terrible debt. He thinks, indeed, that he is in the height of commercial prosperity, rich and increased with goods, in need of nothing ; that his galleys are on the Mediterranean bringing cargoes from Italy and Spain ; that his traders are abroad in Egypt, in Corinth, and on the Persian Gulf, and will soon be remitting vast sums to his treasury. He is ignorant, poor man, that all his schemes have utterly failed, that his ships have foundered at sea, that his traders and agents have miscarried, and that, instead of being the well-to-do merchant that he thinks he is, he is no better than a miserable beggar. This is the man whom the Great Merchantman is addressing. Tidings, indubitably true, of the citizen's losses and ruin have reached Him, and, with inexplicable generosity, He is now pleading with the bankrupt to come to him for supplies of gold.

Christ's salvation is free to poor sinners. It is for the poor, the lost, the undone. "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money ; come ye, buy and eat ; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money, and without price." You are content to live on, shutting your eyes to the rottenness of your spiritual condition, but Jesus now pleads with you, and offers to you His salvation. He asks neither cash, promise, bill, nor goods in exchange. He would have you come to Him without waiting for works, or feelings, or

charities, or even prayers. He wishes you to accept at once the salvation which He holds in His hand.

But why does He say, "Buy of me," if He does not mean us to give anything as the price of His gold? There is no word that has a more pleasant ring about it than "buy." When a man buys anything, that which he purchases becomes his own. He bids his servant convey it home from the market-place, because he has bought it, and it is his. It is the idea of sure and indisputable possession which the Lord Jesus would convey to us by the use of this word. You recollect that Abraham would not take a mere gift of the cave of Machpelah from the Hittites, as a burial-place for his family and himself. He insisted on weighing shekels of silver to purchase it. The buying of the ground from these people made it secure to his family. And Jesus would have us know that the blessings of salvation are not merely free, but are secured to His believing people for ever. The blessings have, indeed, been really and literally bought, and at a price that defies all estimate. They have been bought by the life's blood of the Son of God Himself. He has bought them by dying for us as our substitute on the cross, and it is because He has actually bought them that He comes to us with them in His hand, and makes them over to us without money and without price.

Christ's blessings are not merely freely given.

They are for ever bestowed. He who is saved shall not be lost. He who is justified shall not be condemned. He who is born of God shall not again become a child of the devil. "My sheep shall never perish." "I give unto them eternal life."

It is time, however, that we follow the Merchantman to His stall, and take a look at His wares.

First, here is gold. What is more precious than gold, to rescue the bankrupt from ruin, to save him from the debtor's prison? Yet here it is, and of the finest quality too, without earth or alloy, for it has passed through the glowing fire; gold in such quantity, moreover, that he who has it shall be "rich."

What is this gold? I believe we cannot go amiss in our interpretation if we say that this gold is no other than the LORD JESUS CHRIST HIMSELF,—Jesus who has passed through the fire of the curse of God on sin.

But is not Christ the Merchantman? How can He be the gold? Ah! He is both the Merchantman who gives the gold, and the gold which the Merchantman gives; just as He tells us in John vi. that He gives us the bread of life, and then says, "I am the bread of life." Christ is the gold. The one thing which the Laodicean needed was this gold. He had everything but Christ. All will be right with you if you have Christ; but if you have not Christ, what have you? Nothing. Christ is

our Life. If Christ be not in you, you will be as reprobates. Oh, be sure you have this gold !

But see, the Merchantman has taken down a bale of goods, and unfolds it. Did you ever look on material like this ? White raiment ! Its fabric is like the clothing of the lily ; the more closely it is examined, instead of seeming the coarser, the more exquisite and delicate the tissue appears. It is mysterious raiment too. Strange to say, it absolutely refuses to take on any stain. More than that, it cannot be torn, and it never waxes old. Though worn for fifty years, its gloss and lustre remain as on the first day it is put on. Perhaps you think its possession to be beyond your means. When you visit some place of merchandise, the warehouseman shows some beautiful material. You admire it, but learning how expensive it is, you inquire whether he has any of second quality. He will soon produce another piece, and holding up the fabric perhaps say, "It looks almost as pretty as the first, but there is a great difference between them in price." You say, "Cut me off a portion of this ; it will suit me quite well." And you go away, contented with your purchase. Now, if you ask the Great Merchantman whether He has any raiment of second quality with Him, He will tell you He keeps no other than this white raiment in stock, and, indeed, He is wont to add that, "This is the very raiment which I wear Myself."

What is this white raiment? It is no other than the righteousness of Jesus Christ Himself—that righteousness which He was preparing during all the thirty-three years He was with us on earth; the warp of which is His obedience to the precepts of the law of God, and the woof of which is His endurance of its penalties. These two—His obedience to the precepts, and His endurance of the penalties of the law, make up what is called His righteousness, which having been wrought out for us by Him, He puts, as beautiful clothing, on all that believe on Him.

I see you standing yonder, my poor friend, in your miserable tatters, for what are “all our righteousnesses, but filthy rags”? Now, if we had no other clothing to offer you, we should bid you wash your rags as best you could, stitch them together, patch them up, gather them about you, so that you might look as respectable as possible; but when this beautiful raiment is held forth to you, and it is only necessary that those miserable rags, which even Christ’s blood will never make clean, be flung aside, will you hesitate for a moment to cast all away, and this very hour let Jesus hang His beautiful robe upon your shoulders? The ruin of the Laodicean is that he trusts in himself, and not in Jesus.

But what is this delicious perfume that is stealing over us? Fragrant ointment, which the Great

Merchantman keeps in caskets. It is not the perfume, however, of the ointment which is its chief quality. If ever so little of it be put on the eyes of the blind, immediately he receives sight. "Eye-salve to anoint the eyes with, that thou mayest see." If there was one thing which, in the first instance, the Laodicean needed, it was this—to have his eyes opened, so that he might see his own true condition, and at the same time obtain a glimpse of the preciousness of Christ.

What is this eye-salve? It is the Holy Ghost, the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of God. Until He opens the eyes, the sinner remains spiritually blind; but let this eye-salve be placed on his dark orbs, and a new world will open to his vision,—Heaven, Hell, Sin, Death, Redemption, Salvation, Eternal Life, the Lord Jesus, yea, God Himself!

At Pentecost, when Peter, along with the eleven, preached, an invisible hand, with a little of this eye-salve on its finger, passed over the eyes of the blind listeners. In an instant, the eyes of three thousand men were opened, and with loud cries they interrupted the speaker, saying, in an agony of conviction, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" Their awful guilt, till that moment unknown, stood out at once before them with all its terror. When, after a little interval, the apostle was proceeding, and telling them to repent and to be baptized,

every one of them, in the name of Jesus for the remission of sins, the invisible hand a second time touched with the eye-salve the same eyes, and all at once the three thousand saw Him, whom they had crucified, to be the only Saviour for them ; and long ere the sun set that day they had believed on Him, and were saved.

Were that invisible hand to touch with eye-salve the eyes of all those now before me, what a commotion would there be ! Some would be stricken with a sense of sin ; others would be gladly laying hold of Jesus for salvation.

Fine gold ; white raiment ; precious ointment ; what riches, what varieties are here !

The Great Merchantman is now before you. Will you buy of Him ? I have shown you that neither money nor price must be given, yet assuredly you must buy, in the sense of dealing, or having a transaction with Christ. It is impossible to buy without having a transaction with some one. Now there are multitudes, I fear, who never to this hour have had a transaction with Christ. Oh ! come ; deal with Him, buy of Him !

It is not enough that you admire Christ's wares. I often look through the windows at the beautiful things displayed for sale in our streets, without a thought of purchasing them. I believe you are all looking at Christ's costly things at this moment. But Christ does not bring them out to be looked at.

He means that you should possess them. "Buy of me," He says. He would have every one of you now in this assembly return home with the beautiful wares, to show your wives and children at home what treasures have come into your hand, and to encourage them to come for the same blessings which have made you so rich. Then, see with what confidence Jesus would have you come up to Him. There is a great difference in the manner of a beggar and a buyer. If you are talking to a merchant, you may perhaps observe some very timid individual, with sombre countenance, making signs to your friend. "Who is that?" you ask. "Oh, he is a person who calls round to beg, but I do not mean to give him anything to-day." At that moment, another person steps in briskly, and proceeds to deal with the shopman inside. "Who is that?" "Oh, he is a buyer." Now, we are all none other than beggars, for we have nothing to offer; but, see, the Lord would have us step up to Him with the confidence of buyers. Away then, and do as He bids! But of one thing take heed—that you do not stop short with any subordinate. Do not think it is enough to deal with ministers and teachers. We ministers cannot give you the gold, or the raiment, or the ointment. We are but agents, and this is highest honour, to be sent into the market-place, to invite you to deal with the Master Himself. The loving and beautiful One is behind us, in conde-

scending majesty and kindness, waiting for you to deal with Him in person. Oh! go past us, and every one else, and buy, buy of the Great Redeemer Himself!

III. *The Visit.*—"As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent. Behold, I¹ stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me. To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches."

Let me connect, still somewhat in the style of parable, what is now to be said with what has already been spoken.

The hot and bright day has gone by. The crowd of buyers and sellers has thronged the market-place during the hours of business, but now the sunset has arrived, as is shown by the allusion to supper-time.² The shadows are beginning to fall, and the evening star is appearing in the west. The porters at the gates give token that the market-place must be closed. The stalls are being shut up, and their occupants have been streaming out for some time towards their places of abode. Very soon the market-place is empty. The Great Merchantman

¹ Comp. James v. 9.

² Ver. 20.

has stood all the day long with His hands stretched out, but no man has regarded. And now, having but one day to tarry at Laodicea, He gathers up His wares, and comes forth into the street of the city. Shall He not depart from these infatuated men, and proceed to Ephesus, or Smyrna, or Thyatira, or Sardis, or Pergamos, or Philadelphia? "I cannot leave them," He says, "without dealing with them once again, ere I quit the city." But where is He to find those of whom He is in quest? The citizens have retired to their homes, and each man within doors is seated with his family about him. The table for the evening meal has been spread. The man has taken his place. His wife opposite him with her little one in arms, and the other children, in full prattle, are seated around the table. Ah! just as they are about to commence, a sharp knock is heard at the outer gate. "Is not that the sound of one that knocketh? Run," says the man to one of the children, "and see who it is." But ere yet the gate has been reached, another knock! and while the door is still unopened, a voice comes from outside. The same voice that so often had been heard in the market-place during the day, crying, "I counsel thee to buy of me," is now recognised, in the cold, dark, and silent street without, saying, "*Behold I stand at the door and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.*"

It is the risen Saviour Himself! It is the Lord Jesus who has stepped down from His own throne, and is now, in lowly guise, standing outside in that street,—“His head filled with the dew, his locks with the drops of the night.” “They would not listen to Me at midday,” He says; “perhaps they will give heed at eventide. They would not regard Me in the market-place; it may be they will hearken if I follow them to their own door. They would not open their ear when the crowd of traders was buzzing about them; who can tell but I may gain their heart, when their little children are clustering at their knee, or climbing into their arms?” And so, from noon to evening, from the market-place to the house, from the busy crowd to the family group, the Lord Jesus in His yearning tenderness pursues these self-sufficient sinners. What a contrast to their lukewarmness is this dealing of Jesus!

From the little verse interposed between verses 18 and 20, viz., “As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent. Behold, I stand at the door, and knock:” it appears that, when Jesus stands at the Laodicean’s gate, He not merely comes to the man a second time, but in a different manner. When the Lord stands in the market-place and cries, “I counsel thee to buy of me,” Jesus speaks as He does in His public ordinances, and in the assemblies where multitudes are gathered together. Christ has been in the market-place in all

the congregations of the city to-day.¹ This assembly is Christ's market-place, where He offers to you freely His salvation. But when Christ comes to the man's own door the dealing is of a different kind. It is now that of affliction which is employed ; and so it is, that when the household are seated, as we have seen, at their family meal, suddenly there is a knock at the door, and away a sweet infant is borne out of its mother's arms, and laid in a cold cradle, whence no mother's love will lift it again. While the inmates sit startled, a second knock is heard, and another pretty child is carried away, and laid beside her baby brother under the cypresses outside the city. Or, perhaps, it is that beautiful boy of eight or nine years of age, with his lustrous eyes, glowing cheek, his innocent smile, his ruby lips, his curls falling over his shoulders, his voice, as he passed from room to room, sounding more sweetly in father's and mother's heart than harps or flutes, who disappears. Ah ! those brilliant eyes close to open no more ; that silvery voice is hushed for ever ! Or, it may be, it is the darling mother herself who is beckoned away ; or the young wife, not yet twelve months a bride, who vanishes from sight ; or the dark and ominous shadow begins to steal over the features of one of the family who is inexpressibly dear ; or the stroke of disease falls heavily on the man himself ; or property is all swept away by

¹ Sabbath.

financial disaster ; or beauty suddenly fades from the cheek ; or one of those disappointments that turn life's sweetness into bitterness is permitted to befall ; or one of those nameless sorrows which blight family existence gnaws the heart away ; or the eldest son becomes the victim of strong drink ; or another has gone off, no one knows where, and left a mother's breaking heart behind. I know not all the ways in which Christ knocks at a man's door ; but this I do know, that when He does knock, it is not in wrath. Have we not His explanation of the knock ? "*As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten.*" We have heard of the shepherd who, leading down his flock into a valley, through which a brawling stream was making its way, was anxious to ascend the opposite slope, and so, with the flock, pass on to a better pasture. When the flock was gathered at the stream, no persuasions of his could induce the timid sheep to enter the water and step across. After exhausting all other expedients, he watched his opportunity, and adroitly caught up a pretty little lamb, and held it in his bosom. Then, stooping again, he seized another pretty lamb, and so holding the two innocent creatures in his arms, he strode into and through the stream. The mothers, seeing their lambs carried off, though no other persuasions would avail with them, now followed the shepherd, bleating as they went. Soon the entire flock was across the stream, and all the sheep were

making their way up the opposite slope to the good pasture beyond.

The Lord Jesus, when He sees that fathers and mothers will not give heed to Him, stoops down as the Good Shepherd and gathers their lambs away. They would not follow Him otherwise ; but when He catches up their lambs, then they follow Him ; and so parents and children, and others, it may be, besides, are thus lovingly and happily brought by Him to heaven.

My dear friend, the Lord Jesus is standing at your door at this moment. He is here. Hark ! He knocks. What is it that He wishes ? Is it not that you at once open, and let Him in ? How long does it take to open the door when a stranger knocks ? Will you keep Christ standing all night outside ? You are not required to make the door—it might take some time to do that—but only to open the door. Oh ! by the grace of God, open ; and ere this service close, let Him in. For Christ to cross your threshold is no less than eternal life. All that the Laodicean needed, in order to get quit of his lukewarmness, was but to welcome Christ within his heart. Let Christ in, and your whole life will be revolutionized. Your life will become real from this moment, and be a sham no longer. From this moment you will begin to live to God.

Now, see what takes place when Christ enters the house. The children, perhaps, are timid, and go

into corners, but His soft eye is on them, and He says, "Come, little children, come unto Me. I take up little children in My arms, and bless them. Come, My little dears, to Me." And then, as He seats Himself at the table, how does He speak? Is it to upbraid the Laodicean, to reproach him with his lukewarmness and offensiveness? Oh no! The discourse is of other things. "I am pleased to sit with you at your table. By-and-by I will have you sit at Mine. You have given Me a seat beside you in your house. I will give you, in a little time, a seat beside Me in My throne!" What! "In His throne!" Did I not correctly say this epistle contains more wonderful promise than any of the seven? The lukewarm Laodicean, the man whose condition awakened loathing and disgust in the mind of Jesus, to whom He had said that if he repented not He must spue him out of His mouth, this is the man whom Jesus is now alluring with the promise, and regarding whom He is, moreover, solacing Himself with the idea that that once vile sinner shall by-and-by be seated by Him on His own throne!

Dear brethren, this is Jesus! What say you to receive Him now? As you retire from this place, Jesus will meet you at the door, and will say, "Well, am I to get entrance into your heart to-day?" Perhaps you will reply, "My heart? I did not know, Lord, that Thou wert wishing to come into it. I thought it was only the angel of the church." "Did

I not say, “If *any* man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him”? “Any man” is surely a word for every man among us. He is standing before each heart of all this auditory to-day. Oh! great Spirit of the Lord, come down upon us, and open these stubborn hearts of ours!

“He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.” Amen.

II.

THE CONSTERNATION OF THE EGYPTIANS.

“And Pharaoh rose up in the night, he, and all his servants, and all the Egyptians ; and there was a great cry in Egypt ; for there was not a house where there was not one dead.”—Exod. xii. 30.

THE departure of the Abrahamic family from Egypt is one of the grandest, most wonderful, and most awful events in history. Nine terrible plagues had already smitten the land. It is the tenth, the plague that immediately preceded the Exodus, on which to-day I would fix your attention. My descriptions I shall found on the Scripture, but I crave permission to picture the circumstances in my own way. Let me speak of,

I. *The House of Doom*, and at once place you as spectators in the midst of the terrible scene. We begin with the palace and the royal city. Business has long been over. The levees and audiences of the great, the wise, the mighty in war, of priests and foreign ambassadors, have ended for the day. The lamps in the halls of the Pharaohs have blazed as usual. The evening has been spent in such festivities as brilliant monarchs think it fitting to enjoy and gorgeous heathenism is so able to supply.

The young heir to the throne has been, as usual, the observed of all observers, and in the exuberance of youthful spirit has been amusing himself with the princes, his companions; perhaps arranging to hunt the gazelles of the desert on the following day. But the hour of retirement for the night has arrived. The court musicians, with their pipes, harps, lutes, tabrets, and silver cymbals prepare to withdraw. The darling hope of the kingdom receives his nightly caress from his father ere going to rest. All the courtiers are dismissed. The king is conducted to his couch, and the royal watchers take their places in silence for the night. The cressets are beginning to burn more feebly in their sockets, and the shadows of colossal human figures, of sphinxes and lions in granite and marble, fall gloomily and indistinctly on the paved floors.

Meanwhile the hour of midnight steals on. The palace reposes in the stillness of fancied security.

All at once a horrible shriek rings through the silent galleries!

"Whose voice is that?" is demanded at the doors of twenty chambers at once, by the inmates startled from their sleep by the scream. The attendants on guard at the young prince's apartment aver that the cry has come from within, that their captain has entered to inquire whether an unpleasant dream has troubled His Highness.

Meanwhile, awakened by the terrible sound,

Pharaoh leaps to his feet. He has his own reasons for being uneasy. Accompanied by the official guardian of the royal slumbers, he hurries across the hall, and reaching the young prince's sleeping room, pushes open the curtain and enters. Ah, what a sight! The fair young man, the child of his hopes, the heir of his kingdom, in a state of livid unconsciousness, is in the grapple of death. The king stamps with his foot as if a scorpion had stung him. The barbed arrow, with its point dipped in poison, has at last pierced him to the soul. "My child! my child!" he cries in frantic agony. "That hated, stammering Hebrew has struck him down with his enchantments! Haste, fly for the chief physician!" says the king. "Command his instant presence here—nay, summon all the court doctors, we shall need their best skill. Let some one mount my fleetest horse, and ride at full speed to the high-priest of the great temple, and bid him make costly offerings to the gods of Egypt that the young life may be spared. Fetch the prince's mother here! *See, he yet breathes!* Let some of you"—for now the courtiers are standing by—"repair to the nobles and princes of the realm, the commander-in-chief, and to the magicians and wise men, that they may counsel what should be done. Oh! my son! my son!"

Meanwhile every restorative that affection and solicitude can devise is tried in vain. Life is

evidently fast ebbing, and all hope dies. At this crisis the messenger despatched to summon the chief physician returns, panting with horror. "May it please your Majesty, the chief physician will arrive presently, but he is prostrated in an agony of grief, for his eldest son has been struck, while sleeping, with a mysterious plague, and all the family are gathered round the young man's bed." He has not finished his tale, when the emissaries to the other doctors rush wildly in to announce a similar event in each of their dwellings. Scarcely have they concluded, when those sent to the nobles, counsellors, magicians, wise men, and the commander-in-chief make their appearance, each ghastly pale, to report the stunning intelligence that in each house they had found a scene of consternation like that in the palace. And now, the rider to the high-priest comes in with the awful news that the sacred servant of the great gods of Egypt has suddenly lost his eldest child ; and more than this, that the divine calf, in the holy place, on which the faith of the entire nation was centred, had been mysteriously smitten, and had dropped down dead ; that when he left, the priests were filling the temple with lamentation. As the excited messenger is speaking, the young prince expires. A loud wail, enough to thrill a heart of stone, bursts from each spectator of the dismal sight, and is echoed from every corner of the palace.

It is not for long, however, that the awful spectacle in the royal chamber engrosses all attention. One courtier whispers to another, "You are wanted without delay at your own house. Alarming sickness has entered it, and all are waiting for you, to know what to do." The party so addressed rushes homeward with horrible presentiment. His wife is hysterically sobbing as he enters. There, stretched on his bed, lies his beautiful boy, the light of his dwelling—a corpse! At the same moment, the wail in the out-house, tenanted by the slave who grinds the daily measure of corn for family use, betokens that the woman has lost her bright-eyed little child.

But now let us step outside and walk along the street in the clear moonlight, for the orb is to-night at the full. What a scene of agitation meets us here! At the precise moment when the heir-apparent to the throne was smitten, the silent and invisible Destroyer, without a pulse of warning, and when the family was lying in the stillness of repose, struck the firstborn in each house in every street in all the districts of the city! More than a tenth of the whole population, and that the prime and blossom of it all, was in a moment slain. Fearful retribution this for the king's savage decree, eighty years before, to fling each male infant of God's Israel into the river! The athletic youth bordering on manhood, the merry lad, the laughing boy, the dear little child placidly sleeping in its young mother's

arms, were all alike felled at a single blow. The language of the Bible indicates that all was done so openly as to awake every member of the household. The stricken were not found dead in their beds in the morning. The entire family was aroused at midnight. In most cases the firstborn would be asleep, in some rare instances he may have been sitting up, or have been carousing abroad with his gay companions, or returning late through the street with the lantern in his hand, or spending the pleasant season with some relative at a distance. No matter. Wherever he might be the dread avenger met him, and there was *no escape!* We know what the wail of Oriental cities is on the occasion of one death. What, then, must have been the “great cry in Egypt” when every house in the royal city at the same instant rang with shrieks of terror and despair? Who could know at the time whether the plague which had slain the firstborn might not destroy the other inmates of the dwelling?

The confusion in the streets is indescribable. Whereas, in general, scarcely a footfall is heard after midnight, people are now with loud voices tearing along in opposite directions in quest of physicians, and are madly knocking at the gate of the dispensers of medicine; others rush to inform their friends of the calamity that has befallen their house, only to meet those very friends in distraction seeking them out on a similar errand. Some are hurrying for

fine linen and ointments with which to wind up the dead. Others of richer class are in search of spices and embalmers. - The engravings and pictures on the walls and tombs of Egypt show at this day the prodigious funereal attentions lavished on the lifeless dust.

Not a man or woman is there in all these crowds whose countenance in the strong moonlight does not betray anguish, consternation, and horror ! No class is passed by. Nobles, great captains, the cruel taskmasters, the priests, the lawyers, the physicians, the embalmers, the apothecaries, the soldiers, the musicians, the excavators of sepulchres, the merchants, farmers, shopmen, bakers, fruitsellers, and wine-vendors, tradesmen, artisans, street-criers, labourers, and water-carriers, the ass and camel drivers, boatmen and slaves, the captive in the dungeon, the woman who sat behind the mill, equally with the mighty monarch himself, are involved in this terrific calamity.

Nor is even this all : as every street in the royal city, so every street in every city in all the land is equally visited, from Zoan in the north to great Thebes in the south. Throughout all the valley of the Nile the Destroyer on wings of lightning passed ! Every village, every cluster of mud hamlets, every hovel quivered under the judgment ; while the slaying of the firstborn of all the cattle must have added not a little to the general distraction and

dismay. Never since the beginning of the world was such bitterness endured for the loss of a firstborn, nor since that day has such anguish been experienced again.

“And Moses said, Thus saith the Lord, About midnight will I go out into the midst of Egypt: and all the firstborn in the land of Egypt shall die. . . . And there shall be a great cry throughout all the land of Egypt, such as there was none like it, nor shall be like it any more. . . . I will pass through the land of Egypt this night, and will smite all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment: I am the Lord. . . . And it came to pass, that at midnight the Lord smote all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh that sat on his throne, unto the firstborn of the captive that was in the dungeon; and all the firstborn of cattle. AND PHARAOH ROSE UP IN THE NIGHT, HE, AND ALL HIS SERVANTS, AND ALL THE EGYPTIANS; AND THERE WAS A GREAT CRY IN EGYPT; FOR THERE WAS NOT A HOUSE WHERE THERE WAS NOT ONE DEAD.”

Such is the terrible story! What are the lessons we are to learn from it? Our business is not with the Egyptians, who have been in their graves for thousands of years, but with ourselves.

1. *We are in the hands of a God of Judgment, as well as of mercy.* God will not suffer Himself

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to be trifled with, His laws to be neglected or defied, His authority disowned or treated with contempt. Pharaoh thought he would hold his ground, but the awful narrative before us shows how it fared with him. You are, O proud sinner, in the very hand which crushed Pharaoh; and let me, without arrogating the position of a prophet, assure you that as it happened to him, so, if you continue as you are, shall it be with you. Miraculous judgments and deliverances may not be God's method of procedure, now that the grand canon, the inspired Scripture, has been completed; but it never can be otherwise than that sin and rebellion against the Lord will bring down ruin and destruction. Your very sins themselves will become your detectives, your chains, your prisons, your gaolers, your executioners! You live, depend upon it, under an *iron necessity*. Sin and its penalty are bound together. Your lying and deceit, your grasping selfishness, your sensual indulgence and violations of purity, the wrongs you have inflicted on the betrayed, your dishonesties in business, your fraudulent in-taking of the simple, your prodigal imprudence, your undutifulness to parents and superiors, your ingratitude for kindness, your niggardliness of requital towards those who have laboured for you with their mind, their bone and sinew, your haughtiness and pride, your vanity, and waste of existence, your indolence, and refusal to deny yourself gratifications at the

cost of duty,—all of these will, if you live long enough in this world, recoil on you as your scourges and tormentors here. He that is the slave of his feelings, his lusts, his animal appetites, will be seized by these same criminal lusts and propensities, and, even in this world, will be dragged to the dismal pool¹ or to the consuming fire. You may pass the day in a delirious dream; the base pleasures of the hour, and even of memory, for a time may beguile you. You may imagine that your coveted gratifications are a bower of roses and a couch of down, “a thing of beauty and a joy for ever,” but, the God of Judgment, who smote the Egyptians, has ordered otherwise. Your paradise of flowers will become like a dark field of moving lava, which will scorch your blistering feet. Your soft couch will change into the bed of spikes of the Indian fakir of other days. Sin, while it is the infamy that stains the life, is also its scorpion scourge; it will waste, consume, and devour you. It will issue in shame, degradation, loss of self-respect, remorse and horror. It is a great worm, which, like that which sometimes infests the body, exhausts, eats away, tortures, and destroys the soul. If not mortally wounded now, it will never die!

God has left, in charge over you, Conscience, who with eyes of lightning issues at intervals from the dark chamber, to make us shake, like

¹ 1 Tim. vi. 9, 11 (Gr.).

Belshazzar, with dismay. I have said that, even in this world, the dread penalties annexed to sin are fearfully executed. Those whose experience of human life is widest, deepest and longest, are most vividly aware of this. The history, too, of nations, ancient and modern, reveals the moral government of God in this respect. Still, from the shortness of life in many instances, and on account of interposing circumstances, the issues and true tendencies of sin are not infrequently veiled to us here, but if the judgment which is attached to sin be not visibly inflicted now, all will move on to accomplishment and retribution in the life beyond.

2. The second lesson to be gathered is, that *the stroke may fall unexpectedly, and reach in its consequences beyond all that imagination can anticipate.*

With Pharaoh and some of his counsellors there must have been some dismal forebodings, for they had heard the predicted judgment from Moses' lips ; but by the great mass of the people the blow was unlooked for, and doubtless at the time was unaccountable to them. It came in the dark, at midnight. It fell on the *ignorant* crowd of heathen beings, who had no books, no daily newspaper to inform them of what was going on, most of whom could not even read,—nay, more, the dreadful doom came on the hapless, helpless, and, so far as regarded the refusal to let Israel go, the *innocent* little children of Egypt. Now, you may without

difficulty, but with solemnity, discern from this the awful energy and diffusive virulence of sin, its power to make sudden havoc, and its disastrous pervasiveness of fatal issue. No man can tell when the thunderbolt will fall, where it will strike, what it will overthrow, whom it will involve in ruin. The judgment of sin, gradually preparing, overtakes us oft in a single day. Nay, it comes on us like a thief in the night; and, like the rushing into the dark coal pit of the unsuspected waters, pent in the old workings behind, which¹ occurred some time since, involving the death of so many unfortunate men, and the loss of kindred and of the means of subsistence to so many dependent families, sin breaks forth on us, bringing with it shame, desolation, and death to the man himself, and bearing in its train unspeakable calamity to others.

In saying all this I would not for one moment have you forget the pity, the love of compassion, that glows in the heart of God towards this world. Do you not remember His own pathetic cry over one of the most wicked cities of antiquity when it evinced signs of remorse and penitence? “*And should not I spare Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than sixscore thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand, and their left hand;*”—by which expression little children are understood to be meant,—“*and also much cattle?*” Do you see

¹ In upper Lanarkshire.

how God has consideration for the children and even for the cattle of Central Asia? Let us bear in mind God's immense, yea, unmeasurable love for the men of this world, expressed in the memorable utterance of Christ Himself: "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Still, even in this tenderest and most marvellous of passages the words run, be it observed,—“Whosoever believeth in him should not perish.” God's unutterable love saves men; but then, this “believing in the Son” is the one appointed method of salvation. Let not any one surmise that God will set aside His justice, or will by any means “clear the guilty.” In Christ alone is safety to be found, and in a righteousness which He alone has brought in.

Sin! It is a dreadful power in the world. Once yielded to, it assumes a mastery of which the most cruel slavery that ever afflicted man is but a shadow. It reminds me of a locomotive which, through the unwatchfulness and incapacity of those in charge, has run off the rails, and dashing in among a crowd of bystanders, overturns and explodes, inflicting wounds and death, not merely on driver and stoker, but on the men, women and children near.

Let me take an example from one of the most common class and most prominent illustrations of this, found in the unhappy victim of strong

drink. How simply, good-humouredly, and unsuspectingly he enters the fatal circle,—the child of high aspirations, projects, and intentions! He has no idea of becoming the votary of the cup. He has his bread to win, his reputation to make, his character to establish, his place in society to secure. Should he marry by-and-by, and be surrounded by a family of children, he will be an exemplary husband and father, and with all his house be connected with the ordinances of the Christian Church,—so he intends. Meanwhile, all unconsciously on his part, the insidious destroyer is gaining ground. Neither he, nor wife, nor friend, nor minister perceives that anything is amiss, but not the less certainly has the terrible, the mysterious network, whose cords are never to be broken, been invisibly gathering around him. One day he awakes, his family awakes, his friends awake to the reality,—that he is a captive! He has become the dupe of a power from which there is no release,—and now! time, money, means of every kind, domestic comfort, conjugal love, position in society, respectability, talents, business prospects, friends, health, Bible, prayer, sabbaths, Christian name, Gospel, God's promises, life, heaven,—*all* are thrown aside, and parted with for ever, and either a protracted but useless, wasted, and degraded life is the result, or an early and perhaps a shameful death. But who will say that the terrible evil has by such

a course run itself out? What of the wife? Her heart has been broken, her life changed into a continual agony. She has been bound to one who, though she loved him with fondest affection, is no more to her now than a destroyer. Her home is like a madhouse twice or thrice a week, her ears are rent with oaths, her moral sensibility is rudely blunted, her face and shoulders are disfigured with blows. Alas! the annals of the day reveal bloodshed and brutality as the not infrequent inmates of his dwelling. Nay, the likely issue is that the unhappy woman tries to drown her sorrow by plunging into the same dark depths which have proved the destruction of her husband. And the children! Ah! my heart bleeds. What a home, poor things, is theirs! Their father, when he returns at any time to his house, is a terror, like the man of Gadara, in whom was caged a whole legion of devils! Hear his footsteps as he ascends the stair! Listen to his heavy lunge against the wall as he reels along the passage! Do you note those muttered curses, as he staggers forward and gropes for his door? And now, inside the room, the little creatures huddling in a corner are cowed and affeared because a maniac from Bedlam, called their father, has been let loose on them from the public-house! This is but the beginning of sorrows. These children are probably to follow their father's steps. The virulence of the passion of strong drink

is often transmitted to the poor children as their dismal inheritance. It runs in the blood, and is accompanied with bodily infirmity and disease. The children hear no good, they are brought up in ignorance, strife, profanity, ceaseless misery, and unmitigated ungodliness. And the consequences ! I leave it to yourselves to follow them out. Why, these may go down and down to children and children's children !

This is the "smiting of the firstborn," ay, of all that are born in the drunkard's house ; more terrible, I think you will allow, than even the judgment that fell on the children of Egypt. Now, do not mistake me here, or imagine that I merely have in view to show the evils of strong drink. On the contrary, drunkenness is but a specimen sin. It is of the nature of all sin to explode, to blast and ruin many who stand around, and who are involved in the miscarriage and wrongdoing of other people. Sin is indeed a mystery in its working and results ; no man can say when its poison will die out. Sins committed by ancestors, long since in their graves, come up unexpectedly to scare and even to lacerate their descendants. The sin you thoughtlessly commit now, may reappear when you are fifty or eighty or a hundred years and more in your graves !

Let me warn you against sin. Be assured its deceitfulness is equal to its power to smite and to

destroy. Your present tranquillity is no proof that you are safe from its ravages or its grasp. It would be a promising symptom if some now at ease were overtaken by a feeling of alarm. Take care that sin is not beguiling you with its pleasing lie. Lose no time in repairing to Christ for salvation ; if you put off, you may be aroused when the door is in the act of shutting, and when desire to escape may come too late. The miserable and ignorant Egyptians, struck by the unseen Destroyer in the dark, did not know what to do. They rushed hither and thither, coming into collision with each other in the streets, in quest of deliverance, but deliverance there was none to be had.

Death came, not to leave his card at the door, and say he would call again. Ah ! death came with his coffin on his back, at midnight, into every house. Do not wait till the throes of sickness are on you, till friends and minister are afraid to tell you all the truth, lest the excitement of doing so should be fatal to you. Now the gracious daylight of opportunity is shining around you, and instead of the angel of death being at the door, a better than any angel is waiting in life's open street to guide you to the refuge and to peace. Let the echoes of Egypt's terrible wail, that have come down to us through all these centuries, ring in your ear, and urge the most careless to enter the gate of life while yet it is possible to escape.

II. *The Home of Safety.*—The house of judgment we have witnessed ; let us turn now to the habitation of safety. I must again crave permission to throw into picture the Scripture narrative, as in the former case.

We retrace our way through the hour of consternation and anguish, and take our position beside the cottage of an Israelite, half an hour before midnight. Profound silence reigns throughout the region in which the crowded huts and houses of the now multitudinous colony of Israel are stationed. The Egyptians, many of whom had their dwellings in Goshen as well as in the valley and throughout the Delta of the Nile, are wrapped in slumber. But though stillness prevails in all the land, and here in Goshen as everywhere else, it is evident the Israelites are not in repose. It is the fourteenth of the month, the moon is at the full ; and no one who has seen an Egyptian full moon is likely to forget it. Nevertheless, we can detect a glimmer of light in each Israelitish window. Stepping up to the door of one of the dwellings, we listen. There is a low hum of voices inside. We discover that the family, with the exception of the infants, is astir. We pass onwards to another cottage and find a similar state of things there, and soon perceive that all the household is sitting up, a thing quite unusual. Yet, not one door is open, nor is a single Hebrew abroad. Let me suppose that we gain entrance into one of the habitations. The family presents a startling

appearance,—all the members are dressed as for travelling. The long garments of the men are tucked up and gathered in by their girdles. All have their sandals on their feet, and each man is standing with his staff in his hand. His household goods, such as can with any convenience be moved, are, strange to say, packed up, and some Egyptian vessels, partly of silver, nay, even of gold, along with a quantity of Egyptian raiment, are strapped together in bundles, and are lying in heaps near the doorway. The family has somewhat earlier in the evening finished supper, the remains of it being still on the table; for one entire lamb that evening has been roasted to be eaten, a thing that never happened in the annals of the family before; but again, strange to say, though all parties seem about to start on a long journey, no preparations, in the way of provisions, have been made further than some measures of flour that have been gently soaked with water, so as to form dough, enough to maintain the family for a short time. There is still a fire of waning charcoal on the hearth, for before sunrise all that remains of the flesh of the lamb must, without fail, be burnt. Yet there has been strict attention paid to a requirement that, neither in killing the lamb, nor in roasting it, nor in carving it, nor in eating it, should a single bone be fractured. Singular accompaniments have attended the feast. We observe some blades of bitter herbs, such as are not

usual in gardens, which the younger people have found to be anything but palatable ; and we observe none but unleavened bread has been placed on the table. The supper has been eaten by the family on their feet, rapidly, as if they had scarcely time to swallow it ; and as they ate it they stood, as we have said, all ready, dressed for a journey. It is now some time after the late supper, but they still remain accoutred, as if about to march somewhere.

Another peculiarity is that no one has moved outside to see whether anything is going on. The neighbours who have shared the lamb, which was too large for the one family to consume, make no sign as if they wished to retire homeward. But now there is a faint restlessness apparent among the inmates, as if something of moment were about to happen. “ The hour must be close at hand,” remarks one of the circle. “ May I not open the door, and go outside to look around ? ” asks the eldest boy. “ No, it is at the highest peril for you, or for any one of us to do so,” says the father ; “ for thus has it been commanded,—‘ *None of you shall go out at the door of his house until the morning,*’—and you, my boy, least of all.”

Speech now ceases. As the minutes slowly drift on the sea of night,

“ There is silence deep as death,
And the boldest holds his breath
For a time.”

“What cry is that !” suddenly exclaims the mother of the family, as a shrill wail of distress faintly rises on the ear, from some cottage near. Another and yet another scream ! The first impulse is to rush out to know what is the matter. But the head of the house imperatively orders all to remain still. “That is not a Hebrew’s cry,” he slowly says. “It is some Egyptian neighbour, whose house has been smitten by the Destroyer.” *The plague has begun !* And now every eye is turned towards the eldest boy to watch whether his cheek becomes pale, or his eye grows dim. The moment is one of intense excitement. The work of death has commenced. The terrible sword has been unsheathed. Pharaoh’s son and the eldest born of his mighty men are at that instant dying. “Is no mistake possible in our case ?” the mother asks, while the heart of father and mother alike beats hard. Will the dried drops of blood, now altogether invisible to human eye, that were sprinkled in the afternoon on the old black wood of lintel and posts at the entrance, prove sufficient in the darkness of the midnight hour to ward off this awful death ? One would think that in a crisis of universal calamity, so feeble a defence would avail little ; but no lividness of hue overspreads the cheek, no lack-lustre of faintness dims the eye of the child. The Destroyer indeed came to the house. He made no sign ; he flashed no light on the door ; he gave forth no sound ; all unseen,

unheard, unfelt, unrecognised, unknown, He stood at the Israelite's door. He looked for the token that each spared dwelling was to bear. Ah! the dark little stains, indiscernible by all besides, shone out with a blaze in the eyes of the mighty Destroyer like the gleam of the morning star. HE SAW THE BLOOD. He passed over the door, and glided on to smite yonder abode on whose entrance there was no blood! “And the blood shall be to you for a token upon the houses where ye are: and *when I see the blood*, I will pass over you, and the plague shall not be upon you to destroy you, when I smite the land of Egypt.” There is deep significance in the words. We read: “The Lord will pass over the door, and will not suffer the destroyer to come in unto your houses to smite you.”

Application.—I. The Israelite was calm and unruffled at this, the most solemn crisis that Egypt had ever known. He knew that he needed to do nothing. His “strength” was “to sit still,” and to see the great work which the Lord would do upon the Egyptians. Salvation is not of man, it is of the Lord. The dying cry of Jesus, “It is finished”—not finished by us, but finished for us—is the Church's watchword, in the use of which all the armies of the redeemed in every age and country understand each other, keep together, march to conflict, are invincible and prevail. Israel were made to feel that they, and their redemption from the

house of bondage, were entirely in the hand of the grace of God, and that as to their own deliverance they could do absolutely nothing. Their faith indeed was in high exercise. That faith was tried in no ordinary way. It is written: "Through faith he kept the passover, and the sprinkling of blood, lest he that destroyed the firstborn should touch them." Jesus touched the leper and He healed him; but for the angel to have touched the firstborn of Israel would have been to destroy him! This faith was tested through all that wondrous night, and was evinced by their implicit obedience to Divine command. Still, all this served only as an acknowledgment that salvation was wholly of the Lord.

But the Blood! This was the invaluable secret of deliverance. Those few drops of dark, dry, and, to men, invisible blood were Israel's shield, a shield of greater strength than the might of the Egyptians and of all their gods. And to-day the Blood it is which is the one defence for us; not the blood of a lamb from the fold,—the age of such typical lights and shadows has gone by for ever. The blood we require is the atoning blood of the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world. Than this blood you need absolutely nothing more to be between you and the Destroyer. All the power of sin, of hell, the world, death, and, what is of more importance still, of the flaming sword of avenging

justice, will prove incapable of harming even a hair of your head, of that of your firstborn, or of any believer within your gates. "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house."

2. The blood on the door-posts of Israel clearly showed that the Israelites were spared, not because they were not sinners, but simply because the blood stood between them and the sword of judgment, the just desert of their sins. The blood was not to preserve them from the Egyptians; the surging waves of the Red Sea afterwards were to do that. The blood of the passover was to preserve them from the holy sword of the Lord Himself, which as sinners we have all to dread. Save for that blood, no family in all the tribes would have escaped the Egyptians' doom.

3. Why is it that the blood of Christ, which was symbolized by the paschal blood, avails for our redemption? The "blood of Christ" means simply the death of Christ, that is, His life given for our sins. When that blood is said to be sprinkled on us, the meaning is that Christ's death is reckoned in the way of benefit to us. The sword is no unusual figure in Scripture to represent the inflexible justice of the Holy One. To that sword we are all by our sins exposed. How, then, is safety possible for any of us? In one way only: by the intervention of another—the coming in of One between us and that

sword. And what then? By the descent of that sword on the person of that great interposing Friend, who in our stead, and really in the character of our substitute, receives the terrible wound. Is not this the true and simple meaning of those words uttered in the latest days of Old Testament prophecy, and which the Lord Jesus applied to Himself? "Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, and against the man that is my fellow, saith the Lord of hosts: smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered; and I will turn mine hand upon the little ones."¹ Oh, listen to that loving word, dear children!

There can be no doubt that the deliverance from Egypt by the blood of the paschal lamb was intended to symbolize, and to demonstrate too for all time, that the salvation of sinners in every age and clime was to be by the interposition and the death of God's beloved Son.

We heard lately of a noble man, the engine-driver on a railway, who, when the car of the locomotive caught fire while the train was travelling at high speed, was driven by fear of the flames with his companion into the adjoining carriage. But seeing that the lives of six hundred persons were imperilled, not only by fire, but by the ever-increasing speed which would have involved destruction, he, at the risk of frightful suffering and death, rushed back through the flames and reversed the engine.

¹ Zech. xiii. 7.

Almost immediately the train came to a stop. The passengers all escaped, but the engine-driver was found so scorched that he died in agony four days afterwards, a martyr to his self-sacrificing heroism.

Jesus, in His love, interposed to give His precious life in lieu of ours, and so it is, as Bunyan's Christian at the Cross exclaims, "He gave me rest by His sorrow, and life by His death."

4. Let me try to win you to Jesus. Remember that He who smote the firstborn in Egypt is He who has so lovingly said, "Suffer the little children to come unto me," and who took them up in His arms and blessed them; that He who overthrew the Egyptians is the same who said to the apostate city afterwards, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, . . . how often would I have gathered thy children together," and that it is He who declares, "Say unto them, As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live."¹ The terrible narrative we have been considering is written in compassion for our souls, that we should take heed in time and flee to the home of safety.

The poor Egyptians knew nothing of the blood, no mention even of it was made to them; but in your case and mine it is different. The Lord is now standing at our door with His Divine hyssop in His hand, ready to sprinkle this blood on you, if you will

¹ Ezek. xxxiii. 11.

only come out to Him and trust in Him alone for your salvation. Haste and repair to Him while you may. The atmosphere may be still with the stillness that precedes the hurricane. The storm will undoubtedly burst, the whirlwind rush, the lightning glare. Jesus must be your refuge! He is the hiding-place from the wind, the covert from the tempest. Up then, and go at once to Him. Once within the hiding-place, there you will be sanctified and nourished with that passover provision which will strengthen you for life's patience, perseverance, purity, and peace as you march through this world's great wilderness. The Lord who smote Egypt will Himself rejoice over your salvation, as He tells us, even "with singing."¹ Do you question me about the refrain of the song Divine? Is it not this? Rejoice with me, for this my son was dead, but is alive again; he was lost, and is found.

¹ Zeph. iii. 17.

III.

SIN SOUGHT FOR, BUT NOT FOUND.

READ, AS PRELIMINARY, REV. XX. 11-13.

“In those days, and in that time, saith the Lord, the iniquity of Israel shall be sought for, and there shall be none; and the sins of Judah, and they shall not be found: for I will pardon them whom I reserve.”—JER. l. 20.

PART I.

WHAT a wonderful object is the sea! How much of mystery is there about its depths! With what frequency must it occur to the mariner, that below that surface with which he is so familiar there lies a world, to him all hidden and unknown!

Think of the teeming population beneath these glassy waves; the innumerable forms, some of them huge and unwieldy, others lithe and beautiful, others curious, diminutive, and fragile, that are speeding in every direction; of whose movements, nay, almost of whose existence, the voyager has no token whatever.

Think of the treasures which the ocean has swallowed up. The valuable cargoes, the chests of silver and gold, the caskets of jewels and precious

stones, the bales of merchandise, the stores of rich apparel, the luxuries and curiosities, the priceless memorial records, the ships' guns, the gallant barques, even the ironclads that lie at the bottom of the sea.

Once more, think of the myriads of human beings who have found their last resting-place in the bed of the sea. The naval heroes, and bold commanders, the navigators, traders, noblemen, artisans, emigrants, and sailors; the husbands, wives, parents, and children,—ay,

“ Think of them that sleep,
Full many a fathom deep,”

in the dark and oozy caves of the sea.

Of all this we take no cognizance, as, in a day of calm, we overlook the waters from the green hill slope, or pace in silence along the gravelly shore. The blue waves tipped with foam, the sea-bird disporting in the clear atmosphere, now dipping under the surface in pursuit of its prey, now rising on the wing, the white spray leaping from the rock, the seaweed fringing the reef, the beach with its boulders, pebbles, sands, and shells, the clear rock pools, the cliff caves, the nets and fishing boats,—these occupy the mind at the moment. But were all things that are covered by yonder liquid expanse to be exposed to view, what astonishment would seize on the beholder!

Now, time past, in this world's history, is like

that sea. By far the larger portion of man's deeds, good and evil, has disappeared beneath the waves of time. A few only, comparatively speaking, of the acts done among men have escaped oblivion. These, like fragments of ocean's plunder, thrown up by the sea, and now lying high and dry on the strand, suggest to us how much has been lost to the knowledge of the race. Yet think not that time will never yield up its spoils. Of the briny deep it is said: “And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works.”¹ So shall it be with the sea of time. All the actions done by men on earth shall be at last laid bare. Every work of faith and love and patience done now by the people of God, were it no greater than the giving of a cup of cold water to a disciple, shall be exposed to view.

But more than this, there shall be a resurrection of “dead works” also. Long buried and forgotten sins will suddenly come like drowned seamen to the surface of the waves of time, and startle their now thoughtless perpetrators; for is it not written: “We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad”?²

¹ Rev. xx. 13.

² 2 Cor. v. 10.

It is of sins, rather than of deeds of faith and love, of which the prophet's words invite us to speak. The passage has a threefold application.

1. It refers to the gathering to the Lord Jesus of God's ancient people in days still future.

2. It has a blessed fulfilment at each sinner's conversion to God.

3. But its glorious accomplishment will take place at the resurrection on the great day of the Lord. It is mainly in regard to the last of these applications that I shall view the subject now.

Let me consider some classes of sins that are apt to be overlooked now, but which will reappear in their true malignity at the great day.

1. Sins that seemingly inflict little harm on our neighbour.

We are apt to measure the guilt of sin solely by the amount of injury it imposes on our fellow-men. We forget that the chief element in the guilt of sin lies in this, that sin is a violation of the law of God. "Sin," says the apostle, "is the transgression of the law."

By not a few, Sabbath-breaking is regarded as a slight offence. "It inflicts no wrong," men say, "on our fellows." This statement is eminently untrue; secular amusement, and travelling on the Lord's day, are almost invariably connected with injury to others. But even though the view suggested were correct, Sabbath-breaking would still remain a crime in the sight of Him whose law for the human race

is, "Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy." An unjust dealer may keep his conscience at ease, because the frauds he is accustomed to practise are trifling in degree as to measure, weight, or genuineness of article. A dishonest servant may feel little scruple, because the pilfering from the store or the purloining from the house may have been quite insignificant in amount. In these cases the individuals have not abstracted much, but they have taken what was not their own. They have done slight injury to their neighbour, but they have broken the law of God. God's commandment does not say, Thou shalt not steal much, but simply, "Thou shalt not steal." In the garden of Eden the charge brought against our first parents was not that they had appropriated the property of another, nor that they had eaten a great deal of the fruit. It was enough for their condemnation that they had disobeyed God. Be assured such sins will come up at last to the surface of the sea of time for judgment.

2. Sins of omission as distinguished from sins of commission.

Conscience not infrequently takes feeble cognizance even of sins of commission; of sins of omission it is still more negligent. Let it, however, be remembered that it is not enough that we refrain from doing what the law forbids; we are equally bound to perform all that the law requires. Who does not know that the most lamentable accidents on railways,

in collieries, or by collision at sea occur through unintentional neglect? When in India, I visited the Residency at Lucknow,—the scene of the terrible siege during the Mutiny. An affecting incident occurred during the blockade. One night it was judged expedient to despatch four officers to examine a position, beneath which it was suspected the enemy was leading a mine. Orders were accordingly issued, warning the various sentries not to fire, as the parties moving over the ground would be officers on duty. The survey had been satisfactorily performed, and the four officers were returning in the dark, when a flash occurred at one of the posts, and one of the officers fell mortally wounded, expiring the same night; Lieutenant Birch by name, of the 59th Native Infantry. Whence did this happen? On inquiry it was found that, soon after the order to the sentries had been given, a change of guard had taken place, and that unfortunately one of the sentries had omitted to warn the soldier who had relieved him not to fire. Hence the lamentable calamity; all the more distressing that a young widow was left, the officer having been married only six months.

Sins of omission are frequent. Look at family relationships. The same man may be at the moment husband, father, brother, son, uncle, nephew, grandson, cousin, master, and head of an establishment. All these relationships have a claim on him. It is

not enough that he can protest he never did the parties any harm. The solemn question will still remain, what good has he done, or tried to do them? Even those actions that are outwardly becoming may prove valueless from the absence of proper motive. If there be the omission of faith and love in the doing of them, these may only resemble the beautiful but dead shells strewn on the sea shore from which the living inhabitant is gone.

See how Scripture deals with sins of omission. The charge against men is not merely that "all have sinned," but, "that all have come short of the glory of God." The threatening of the law is not, Cursed is he that breaketh the law, but, "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them."¹

The great commandment is not merely that men should not disobey God, but, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself."² In the parable it is not a servant who has embezzled his master's money who is thrust into outer darkness, but one who has omitted and neglected to turn it to good account.

3. Sins committed, after a habit of committing them has been formed.

It commonly happens that the commission of

¹ Gal. iii. 10.

² Luke x. 27.

heinous sin for the first time occasions remorse ; but such is the mysterious influence of habit, that we have only to indulge in the repetition of the sin in order to blunt the remonstrances of conscience, and perhaps stifle conscience altogether. Then, as we are wont to measure the guilt of sin by the amount of pain it inflicts on ourselves, those sins are little thought of which are committed after conscience, through the influence of habit, has lost its sensibility. Let an example be taken from the sin of swearing. On the first occasion that a young man, coming from his rural home to labour in one of our city factories, is provoked to utter an oath, his conscience inflicts a sharp pang. He remembers the warnings his mother gave him ere he reached the great city, and he is filled with remorse ; but temptation recurs, and again he swears, and again, until frequency in sinning sweeps repugnance aside, and the man will not scruple to call down God's eternal wrath on his comrade, his dog, his hammer, his axe, his pen, the irons at his hearth, his wife, his child, nay, probably on himself as often as on any other object. If you check the man, he will excuse himself on the plea that he did not mean what he said, that he did not even know he was uttering an oath, and that, as he certainly had no bad intention, he should not be strictly judged. Oh, swearer, your own excuse proves you guilty ! What is the commandment ? Is it not, "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain" ? If

calling down God's eternal wrath on yourself, your neighbour, or your dog, without thinking of what you are saying, be not taking God's name "in vain," I know not what is. And if for "every idle word that men shall speak," as Christ has said, "they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment,"¹ what shall be thought of those oaths which the sinner in his passion, the fool in his boasting, or the drunkard in his incoherency vomits forth? Now, what is true of swearing is true of all other sins.

4. Sins, the pain arising from which has by lapse of time been removed from the conscience.

There are many sins, which at one time gave you distress, that have ceased to trouble you. Is it the application of the blood of Christ that has relieved you? If so, I congratulate you: all is as it should be, for it is the function of the precious blood by cleansing the conscience to heal it. But what the blood is authorized to do, nothing else is. Time has no right to tranquillize conscience, for it has no ability to cleanse it. There are sins which you committed five years ago,—ten, twenty-five, forty-five, sixty years ago, and which occasioned you keen anguish at the time, though they have faded from your memory to-day. But if these sins have not been effaced by the blood of Christ, they remain just as they were on the day of transgression. You know that if while on ship-board you weigh anchor and

¹ Matt. xii. 36.

recede from the base of a lofty mountain that rises from the margin of the sea, the mountain will diminish in altitude and size according to the distance you recede from it, and will ultimately disappear. But you have only to return to its vicinity to find the mountain towering and in magnitude as before. So is it with sins that have not been removed by the blood; time in their case corresponds with distance in the other; for is it not written, "One day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day"?

5. Sins against Christ and the Gospel.

Few things show more clearly the fallaciousness of our own feelings as a standard by which to judge of the guilt of sin than the manner in which we treat what, for lack of a better name, I call Gospel sins. That which men think to be beneath their consideration, God regards as most heinous iniquity. We are accustomed to deem Sodom and Gomorrah as the very type of transgressors, and yet our Lord tells us it will be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for Capernaum, which with all its synagogues and fair appearances rejected His mission. Let us suppose Peter and John or two of the seventy disciples during our Lord's ministry at the gate of some town, commencing to fulfil their commission as evangelists. The townspeople demand, "Who sent you? Why do you come to us? We have priests, Levites, and

ecclesiastics of our own ; we do not require you to be our teachers. Begone from our city, you are not needed here." These persons would probably forget the occurrence within an hour or two ; and yet of such a city Jesus said, " Verily I say unto you, it shall be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for that city."

There are those whose conscience would smite them for defrauding their fellow-men, who would have no compunction in rejecting or neglecting Christ and the offer of His salvation from week to week. Unbelief is at once the most offensive and the most dangerous of all sins. Now what may be considered as Gospel sins ? The sin of refusing to repent and to turn to God ; the sin of not receiving Christ for personal salvation ; the sin of withholding the heart from Christ, of restraining prayer, and of leaving the Bible unread. These sins will all reappear at last and come up to the surface of the sea for judgment.

I have one question to ask you. What do you mean to do with your sins ? or shall I say, What have you done with them ? Your sins ! you cannot deny their existence. It is surely not obtrusive in me to inquire what expedient you have thought of for freeing yourself from their terrible responsibility. Do not soothe yourself with the idea that your sins, being as you acknowledge innumerable, will not be reckoned for, or that the multitude of persons whose

case is like your own, is so vast as to preclude serious consequences to any. Remember you have to deal with One who is infinite, and who may have methods of procedure in judgment surpassing our conception.

Some time ago when crossing the Indian Ocean on my way to Calcutta in the largest of the fleet of steamers then in the line, I used occasionally to beguile the time by standing at the stern of the vessel, and bending over the taffrail watch the churning of the deep by the mighty screw which night and day propelled the huge ship through the waves. The sight was peculiarly beautiful at night, when the brilliant phosphorescence of the sea left a pathway of fire in our wake. I tried to catch a glimpse of the mechanical agency which produced all this effect, but however anxiously I strained my eye, I could never detect even the tip of one of the screw blades. The propeller was ever deep in the water and entirely out of sight. Now let me suppose that when I had reached Calcutta, ere landing, I had put the question to a fellow-passenger, "How often do you imagine the screw will revolve in twenty-four hours?" The answer would probably have been, "Who can tell that, and who would care to know it?" "Oh, but," my reply might have been, "I can not only tell you this, but even how many revolutions have been made by the screw from the moment the ship weighed anchor at Southampton, till she

dropped anchor here at Garden Reach, Calcutta."

"Impossible!" he would in all likelihood exclaim.

"Don't you remember the storm in the Bay of Biscay—then how the vessel anchored for half a day at Gibraltar—how she lay off at Valetta in Malta for hours—how she steamed across the Mediterranean to Port Said—how we slowed through the Suez Canal—how we waited for the mail a whole night at Suez—how we sailed for days, down the long Red Sea—how we remained for six hours at Aden? Then do you not recollect how we stopped the engines in the Indian Ocean to bury the Jewish gentleman from Sydney, who died on the passage—how we then lay in the Bay of Galle at Ceylon for twenty-four hours—how we remained off Madras for six hours, steamed up the Bay of Bengal, entered the Hoogly, and anchored for a night at Diamond Harbour—and now here we are at Calcutta? Who could tell how often the screw turned round, with so many stoppages, and so many changes in the rate of motion by the vessel?"

"Oh," I might reply, "I can certify to you, even to a single revolution, the number of times that the screw turned, from the beginning to the end of the six weeks' voyaging. Nay, I shall not hesitate to tell you, if you have only patience to listen to me. It was precisely two million, two hundred and seventy-nine thousand, seven hundred and eighty-three times—not one more, not one less." "How do you know

all this ? ” my friend might ask me. “ Who has told you ? Was it the captain ? ” “ No. ” “ Was it the chief officer of the ship ? ” “ No. ” “ Was it the chief engineer ? ” “ Well, I admit he had something to do with my information, but it is not on his authority that my computation is based. ” “ What is your authority ? ” he would inquire. “ The authority that assured me was an infallible one. It was that of the *machinery itself* ! That mechanism has been so constructed as to record with accuracy every revolution, and the record on this occasion I witnessed myself, and took note of at the time. ”

What ! is man with his limited capacity able to construct a machine which, though it works entirely out of sight, is adequate in such diversity of circumstances and for an indefinite period of time to keep account of its every action—nay, is constrained to do so ; and shall we think that the great God is not provided with resources by which all that men have done and spoken and thought shall one day be reckoned for ? It may not be necessary to fetch testimony from without. For all we know, the business of the day of judgment may be transacted in a few hours. God may obtain testimony enough from within ourselves to make all things clear, as to the condition of each of us. For is it not written with respect to that great day, “ So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God ” ? ¹

¹ Rom. xiv. 12.

PART II.

THE SALVATION OF GOD'S PEOPLE IN THE DAY OF THE
LORD.

“And the sea gave up the dead which were in it ; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them : and they were judged every man according to their works.”¹

Under the names Israel and Judah in the verse before us, not only God's ancient people when restored are represented, but all Christ's people of every age and nation. With reference to them all, the words show that a search will be made for their sins, in common with those of other men, and for the purposes of judgment. “In those days, and in that time, saith the Lord, the iniquity of Israel shall be sought for, . . . and the sins of Judah.”

Now consider here :

1. *The Inquest.*—By whom shall this inquest or search after Israel's sins be conducted? The challenge is given to the universe. “Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect?” Any one, and very significantly Satan, the accuser of the brethren, will be at liberty to ply the task. But beyond all created intelligences God Himself will make inquest.

He searches the heart. “All things are naked

¹ Rev. xx. 13.

and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do."¹ From His eye nothing can escape. He "will bring to light the hidden things of darkness,"² and "shall judge the secrets of men."³ "For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil."⁴

2. *The Field of Inquiry.*—What shall be searched? The whole volume of our history in this world will be searched. Every spot on earth on which our footprint can be traced will be examined. Every individual man, woman, or child on whom the impression of our influence can be detected will be scrutinized. Every cubic foot of air into which we have breathed our inmost thought will be exposed to test. The great "Books" will be opened; those registers kept in heaven in which all that has been done on earth has been recorded shall be searched from end to end; but beyond all this the great sea will be searched—the great sea of the memory of God—that memory of which it may be said, "It is as high as heaven; what canst thou do? deeper than hell; what canst thou know?"⁵ The infinite God will search the infinite memory of God—that memory which, like earth's ocean, retains within its depths all unknown and mysterious

¹ Heb. iv. 13.

³ Rom. ii. 16.

² 1 Cor. iv. 5.

⁴ Eccles. xii. 14.

⁵ Job xi. 8.

things. The memory of God will in this dread inquest be swept as with a net throughout all its abysses. “The Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God.”¹

3. *The Issue of the Search.*—What shall be the issue of the search? When the great sea of the memory of God is searched for Israel’s dead works that have gone down beneath its waves, what is the result? “The depth saith, It is not in me: and the sea saith, It is not with me.”² When the infinite memory of God is searched by the infinite God Himself, strange to say, there is not a trace of Israel’s guilt to be found, not a token of evidence against Judah anywhere to be discovered. Everything of the kind has disappeared—nay, has vanished out of existence. As I think of that day of grace in the future with relation to the very people who crucified the Son of God, and to that crime of Israel and Judah which has been followed by the judgment of so many centuries, the idea presented in the prophet’s words is overwhelming. What! not a trace of even that greatest of all sins to be found in the Divine memory! No, nor of any sin of all the children of God. For is it not written?—“In those days, and in that time, saith the Lord, the iniquity of Israel shall be sought for, and there shall be none; and the sins of Judah, and they shall not be found.” “I, even I, am he that blotteth

¹ 1 Cor. ii. 10.

² Job xxviii. 14.

out thy transgressions for my own sake, and will not remember thy sins."¹ "I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and, as a cloud, thy sins : return unto me."² "For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins—and their iniquities will I remember no more."³

"I hear the Accuser roar o'er ills that I have done ;
I know them well, and thousands more :
Jehovah findeth none."

For "In those days, and in that time, saith the Lord, the iniquity of Israel shall be sought for, and there shall be none ; and the sins of Judah, and they shall not be found."

PART III.

THE FOUNDATION AND SPRING OF SALVATION.

Let us explain this seeming anomaly of the sins of God's Israel not reappearing for judgment.

It has been a question among some parties whether, considering such striking passages as have been cited at present, there will be any mention made of the sins of God's people in the day of the Lord. I believe the question is one of words rather than of real diversity. Were my opinion asked, I would be inclined to say that mention of believers' sins will be made. Let no man shrink the less from the commission of sin, under

¹ Isa. xliii. 25.

² Isa. xlv. 22.

³ Heb. viii. 12.

the hope that possibly his transgressions may never be heard of again. I observe that it is to His disciples the Lord says, “Beware ye of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy. For there is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed; neither hid, that shall not be known. Therefore whatsoever ye have spoken in darkness shall be heard in the light; and that which ye have spoken in the ear in closets shall be proclaimed upon the housetops.”¹ And again, it is to Christians the apostle says, “Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts.”² The glory of the Redeemer seems to demand such a mention of sins. How otherwise would the power of His grace and the efficacy of His precious blood be adequately evinced? Can we think that even in heaven, believers will forget the sins they have done, or keep silence with regard to them?

But if there be mention made of believers' sins at the great day, there must be some all-important sense in which they shall not be mentioned, and in which they will absolutely “be remembered no more.” What is that all-important sense? It is this. They shall not be made mention of as a *charge* against them. “Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth.”

¹ Luke xii. 1-4.

² 1 Cor. iv. 5.

There will be no sins producible in court inferring the infliction of Divine wrath on the transgressor. This is the explanation which is given in the text itself; "For," God says, "I will pardon them."

Whence is it that Israel's sins shall not come up against them for judgment? I rejoice to say that the answer to be given to this question is simple. With regard to God's converted people, no charge will be produced against them at the great day, for this reason, that all the sins of the children of God will have been brought into court already. The grand assize has indeed already been held; all the iniquities of God's Israel have been brought before the Divine tribunal for judgment; they have been confessed; sentence has been pronounced on them—nay, the sentence has actually been executed. On this account their sins cannot be summoned up for judgment a second time. This, then, is the answer to the question. But, you demand, when did all this take place? I reply, when the Lord Jesus Christ was upon earth. It was mainly to accomplish our deliverance from these sins that He appeared. It was not merely to communicate new truths that He came from heaven—a prophet inspired like Isaiah or Daniel could have done that; nor was it only to set us an example of obedience that He walked among us; nor was it that by His majestic illustration of self-sacrifice He might influence

the hearts of men to the end of time. The Son of God came to do that which none but Himself was adequate to discharge. And what was that? It was that He might put sin away. And how did He accomplish this? It was not by the force of omnipotent strength, so thrusting sin out of the universe, but by taking on Himself the mighty load of the sinner's guilt. The innumerable transgressions of sinful men were piled on His head. "He hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin." Though purer than the light of heaven, He was made sin for us. "He bare our sins." It is said by the prophet, "The Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all." You remember that when Israel was in Egypt, one of the fearful plagues God sent to prepare the way for His people's deliverance was that of a cloud of locusts which, issuing from the Arabian desert and "warping on the eastern wind," came across the Red Sea, and, after darkening the face of the sky in swarms of innumerable millions, descended to the ground, covering the whole land of Egypt, and devouring every green thing. Well, the sins of men came like such a cloud; they gathered round, and settled on the person of the Son of God. If we could think of a towering mountain, whose slopes and summits clothed with unsullied snow, were suddenly to be surrounded by a dark cloud of locusts, and completely overspread with their dusky forms, so that not one white spot on the

entire mountain could be discerned, however incongruous such a similitude may seem to be, we make use of it now to represent Christ, in whom was no sin, being made sin for us. It is as thus loaded with these sins that we find Him saying in the fortieth Psalm, which inspired authority points to Christ, "For innumerable evils have compassed me about; mine iniquities have taken hold upon me, so that I am not able to look up: they are more than the hairs of mine head; therefore my heart faileth me."

He who was holiness itself was covered with our iniquities. Ah, assuredly, none but One who was Divine was fitted to sustain such a load! And, when these sins were so laid on Him, how did He put them from Him? Not by casting them off as a horrible encumbrance. The only way by which they could be removed was by the punishment for them being endured. "The wages of sin is death." If Christ was to prove our deliverer from sin, it could only be by receiving the wages of sin. Accordingly, He is declared not merely to have been "made sin for us," but to have been "made a curse for us." He bore the punishment which sin deserved. The sins were taken up from earth and laid on Him, but the curse came down from heaven and fell on Him; and so, by His enduring the penalty of sin, which is death, He puts sin away. For those who believe in Him, therefore, there can be no condemnation.

The sins of all who truly trust in Him are “put away,” are “blotted out,” are destroyed, abolished, annihilated ! When sought for, there is none ; when diligently searched for, they cannot be found !

Let me here give rein to my fancy for a few moments. Who is he that I see on my right hand ? He is a paragon of manly beauty. Mark the brilliancy and softness of his eye. What exquisite features ! What a winning expression ! Was ever one more handsome in person, more engaging in movement, more fascinating in manner ? No wonder that every one who comes near him is brought under his sway. He is every inch a prince. And look at the profusion of luxuriant locks that hang over his manly shoulders. Indeed, the chronicles of his country have celebrated his personal qualities. It has been put on record regarding him, “ In all Israel there was none to be so much praised for his beauty : from the sole of his feet even to the crown of his head there was no blemish in him.”¹ Yet this handsome exterior covered baseness, profligacy, and crime. Like the tiger, which is at once the most beautiful and the most cruel of animals, this paragon of attractions was no other than a consummate villain. At the moment I look on him, his hands are red with the blood of his elder brother, whom, in the height of his thoughtless gaiety, he has ruthlessly murdered. Other enormities of hateful

¹ 2 Sam. xiv. 25.

character he has openly perpetrated, and now as the climax of his wickedness, he has driven his venerable father from the throne. Nay, at the moment, he is at the head of an army of traitors, and is compassing his father's life. But see, mounted on his mule, which is gaily caparisoned with purple and gold, he is riding off from the terrors of the battle that has gone against him. He is anxiously making for the wood, spurring his straining mule so as to reach it and save his life. He is passing underneath the oaks, whose boughs project somewhat low from the trunk. All the better for him. He stoops. Concealment will protect him from the foe. Ah! what do I see? By strange accident his head is awkwardly caught in one of the forks of the branches, his beautiful hair suddenly twists about the rough stem, and like a halter holds him fast. The affrighted animal with distended nostrils bolts forward. The prince is snatched from his seat, the reins are wrenched from his hands, and there he hangs struggling and convulsed between heaven and earth, vainly attempting to get free. And now who is this that has crossed the plain and entered the wood in pursuit? It is the redoubtable captain himself of the opposing host, with three darts in his hand. "Oh, are you hanging there?" he says, and, seizing with his right hand one of the darts, launches it with sure aim at his breast. "Not dead yet!" and he casts another at him, which sticks in his

flesh. "Not dead yet!" and he hurls the third at him, and then retires. But this is not all,—ten young men, who bear the great captain's armour, and have witnessed what their chief has done, come up, and, drawing their swords, hack and hew the quivering frame, till the unhappy victim breathes no more. "Served him right!" you exclaim. The fratricide, the adulterer, the traitor, and the parricide justly dies. But not yet have we mentioned all. There is still a terrible feature in the case. By the law of his country, being caught in his sin and hanged on a tree, he is accursed of God. For it is written, "Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree."

You have recognised the picture. This is Absalom, the son of David, who is receiving the due reward of his deeds.

But now turn to the other side. Who is He that there meets the eye? He has attractions which far excel those of the other. See, "grace is poured into His lips." It is declared of Him in the annals of the kingdom that He was "without blemish, and without spot." Nay, it is said of Him, "That he is the chiefest among ten thousand, . . . and altogether lovely." Who is this matchless One? It is another son of David; yes, but beyond that, He is the Son of God. Who has ever been able to charge Him with any deviation from rectitude, or with having harmed a hair of the head of any one. Nay,

He has ever done that which was pleasing in the eyes of His Father in heaven, who has once and again opened the sky itself to proclaim that He was His beloved Son, in whom He was well pleased. His entire life on earth has been one of beneficence and love. He has ever been the friend of the poor, the sick, and the sorrowful. But what bloody marks are these on His forehead? Can these be iron nails that have been driven through His hands, have torn His limbs, and have fastened Him to the stem of a tree? I perceive that He is stripped and bare; His head has fallen lifeless on His breast; and, lo, a long spear has been thrust into His side and heart, leaving a wide gash. But this is not all. He has been nailed to a cross, and hung up between heaven and earth. He is, by the law of His country, *accursed* of God; for it is written, "Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree." Whence this similarity, almost identity of treatment in the case of the basest and of the holiest of human beings? We can easily understand how such a doom should have come on the one son of David, but how shall we explain the doom which has come upon the other? There is but one explanation. Absalom suffers for his own sins; Jesus suffers for the sins of others. Both receive the due reward of iniquity, the punishment of transgressions; but in the case of the one son of David the retribution righteously comes on him for his own sins; in the case of

the latter Son of David the retribution righteously comes on Him for the iniquities of others, for whom, as a substitute, He died. Is it not written of Jesus, "By his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities"? And yet again, "Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree." What shall we then say to these things? If you reject Christ as your ground of confidence before God, and are content to stand on your own merits, then you must take your place alongside of Absalom and such as he, and as sinners you will share Absalom's doom; but if, on the other hand, you betake yourself to the Lord Jesus, and place all your confidence for salvation in Him, then assuredly, since His very function is to save those that trust in Him, and this by His dying for them, He will deliver you.

If, like Absalom, you are to receive at last the due reward of your deeds, I do not see how you can be saved; but if, by God's good hand, you truly take hold of Christ for salvation, I do not see how you can be lost!

We have been contemplating Christ as our substitute, dying in our stead; but let us bear in mind that the Lord Jesus who died for us is risen again, that He is in heaven to-day; nay, that He is with us now, pressing on our reception the Gospel of glad tidings; ay, making offer of Himself to us for salvation. He was dead, but behold He is alive for

evermore, and with His eyes now benignantly resting on you He invites you all to come nigh and find refuge in Him. How ever dreadful the past with you may have been, and though your sins have been aggravated to the uttermost, yet is He ready to welcome you.

Remember it was for sinners that He died, and that it is only sinners whom He saves. Of His ability to deliver you from death there can be no question ; as little question can there be of His willingness to do so. I remember seeing a little child in the Rue de Rivoli in Paris, falling down before the horses of an equipage driven rapidly along. Some one rushed forward, and, seizing the child, snatched it from a dreadful death. Do you think the mother of that child, in clasping her darling within her quivering arms, would not be thrilled with emotion and almost faint for joy ? Not so glad would that mother be in taking her rescued child to her bosom as will be the Lord Jesus, if now, as the chief of sinners in all this company, you betake yourself to Him for deliverance.

Nor let any one imagine that, in thus receiving Christ and the forgiveness of sins, there will be any risk lest that holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord, will be overlooked ; on the contrary, God's way of pardon and peace, through faith in the blood of the cross, is God's way of purity. If you come truly to the Lord Jesus, your whole life

will be changed and revolutionized. You will never again be the same as you have been. I may say more than that: never till you come to Christ, as a sinner to be saved, will you be holy. This—the bringing of men by His grace to His Son—is God's great secret for making men good, upright, truthful, honest, spiritual, and pure in heart. Do not, then, keep aloof from Jesus till you are holy. You cannot become holy, you cannot do even one holy thing till you come to Him.

In offering Christ to you by the Gospel, God has not more in view deliverance from the punishment of sin than from sin's hateful dominion, power, and pollution.

I have given scope to my fancy in this address. Let me do so once more.

What is that which with my mind's eye I witness? Volumes of black smoke are ascending continuously from the earth. It must be some deep pit from which the dark fumes arise. And what object is that which beyond the column of smoke I see flitting fitfully, now on one side, now on the other? As I strain my eyes I perceive it to be an old man of courtly aspect. The traces of some great woe are on his features. His white hair falls on his shoulders, but encircling his head I observe what seems to be a crown. The figure clasps his hands as if in despair, and alternately approaches and recedes from the edge of the gloomy pit, uttering a deep groan, as

from time to time he looks down into the abyss. But hark ! He speaks ! Hush—hush—hush ! It may be, if we remain breathlessly still, we shall catch the words as they fall from his lips. “Oh, oh, oh ! My son Absalom,—my son,—my son Absalom ! Would God I had died for thee ! Oh, Absalom,—my son,—my son !”

It is the dear old king mourning over his lost boy, his son, his beautiful son, irretrievably lost ! Ah, there is bitterness unspeakable in his anguish, for well he knows that but for his own inexcusable sin he might never have had that day of sorrow !

Fathers and mothers, take heed, lest, while you yourselves through grace go to heaven, your sons and daughters, through your thoughtlessness and folly, perish in unbelief, and stumble down into the darkness. “Oh, Absalom, would God I had died for thee !” That was all which the good king, from whose lips so many golden words had issued, could say at the crisis of his life. How empty, how vain was the wish !

How little could such a substitution have availed to take the poor lost boy from the pit. No David, king though he might be, could by dying in his stead avail for Absalom !

But now look over there a little way. On yonder rock there is one who is singing. Listen, for the music is artless and the words are sweet. It is the “new song” that we hear. “I was before a

blasphemer and a persecutor, and injurious ; but I obtained mercy. He took me from a horrible pit. He set my feet on a rock. His name shall endure for ever. He loved me and gave himself for me !"

In that substitution there was rescue and eternal life, secured by Paul.

He "loved me and gave himself for me." Amen.

IV.

CHRIST'S DOVES ON THE WING.

"Who are these that fly as a cloud, and as the doves to their windows?"—ISA. lx. 8.

THESE words occur in a prophecy that awaits fulfilment in the latter days. They refer without doubt, in the first instance, to God's ancient people, though it is quite lawful to apply them to the ingathering of Jew and Gentile in all ages. The prophet is represented as on his watch-tower, gazing around, and witnessing many companies coming to Zion. Looking westward, towards the Mediterranean, he beholds a fleet of ships bringing home from Tarshish and the Isles such of long-exiled Israel as were in that direction. The white-sailed fleet, seen rising in perspective with their bows directed to the promised land, suggests the idea of a cloud or flock of doves high in the air, and speeding homewards to their dovecots, or, as we may interpret the language, to their nests in the crevices of the cliffs.¹ The figure employed by the prophet may be regarded as illustrative of Conversion to God,

¹ The Hebrew word is literally doves' houses.

The picture suggests :

I. *The sinner startled from his security.*

The sinner awakened is like a dove startled and rising on the wing. Why may an awakened sinner be compared to a dove ? Is it because he is pure, or gentle, or harmless, or loving as a dove ? Not at all ; but because, like the dove, he is weak, is easily scared, and when conscience-stricken trembles with alarm. It is because he is helpless and without means of defence ; because in the hour of danger his only resource is flight ; and because his strength lies not in himself, but in his rock of refuge. So far from the sinner being pure, gentle, harmless, innocent, and loving as a dove, his heart is a hotbed of corruption. It teems with arrogance, pride, covetousness, lust, discontent, selfishness, cruelty, and deceit. It is filthy, frivolous, impatient, headlong in the gratification of its passions. It is full of rancour, bitterness, and revenge. Above all, it is *ungodly*.

Some people conceal their true character from their fellow-men, who only see them from a distance ; but when at home they are discovered to be tyrants ; their own relatives can scarcely live with them. They are rude, exacting, irritable, and unkind ; they are found to be wrapped up in earthliness, and their behaviour sordid, mean, and unlovely. It is not what a man is called, but what he really is, that is supremely important. The meaning of the name Jonah is “dove,” a beautiful name, suggestive of

feathery softness ; but the man was peevish, proud, selfish, unloving, and disobedient. There are some men who remind us of that magnificent mountain in the range of the Andes in South America,¹ which rises symmetrically above the clouds in the form of a graceful cone. Its slopes are covered with snow, white, cold, unsullied, and motionless. All this is on the outside. But what is there all the while within ? The mountain in its interior glows with volcanic fire. So there are persons who in outward appearance are the picture of propriety, serenity, and purity, who are yet burning inwardly with truculent maliciousness, quivering with unhallowed passion, and smouldering with envy, degrading jealousy, and dishonest greed.

There is great need of our knowing what we really are. Many are in danger of being for ever lost, because they are at present in ignorance of their being lost. "The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was *lost*." The only people He came to save were lost sinners. If we refuse to acknowledge that we are by nature lost sinners, we are doing all we can to put ourselves apart from those He came to save.

When in the city of Philadelphia a few years ago (1878), an incident was told me which I may recount. A great assemblage of young people was being held, and as the speaker was about to address

¹ Chimborazo.

the children, a man under strong excitement entered the hall and made his way to the platform. What had happened? The stranger informed the gentleman that he and his little child were coming to the meeting, but that they had been separated on the crowded pavement, and that his little girl was lost. It was just possible that she might have found her way by herself into the hall, if not, he must give notice to the police, and have search made for her through the city. “We shall soon learn whether she is here,” said the chairman, “what is the child’s name?” “It is Mary Wilson.” Then raising his voice loud enough for all the children to hear, he said, “*If Mary Wilson, who is lost, be in the meeting, let her stand up.*” Amid profound silence the gentleman and the stranger looked over the throng; but no one rose. Said the gentleman again, “If Mary Wilson, *who is lost*, be in the meeting, let her rise from her seat.” There was no response. “She cannot be here,” said the gentleman; and the sad father went hastily out to seek his child. When the service was over, and the young people had dispersed, the chairman saw a little girl sitting by herself on one of the benches. Going up to her, he inquired why she remained. The girl said, “I am waiting for some one to come and take me home.” “What is your name?” inquired the gentleman. “It is Mary Wilson.” “Mary Wilson! Did you not hear me say twice over this evening that ‘if Mary

Wilson, who is lost, were in the meeting, she was to stand up'?" "Oh yes," said the child, "but I *wasn't lost!*" Her ignorance of being lost prevented her from being found. Are there not many much older than she who never are found by the Lord, because all their life they remain in ignorance of their being lost?

Now the sinner, when roused from his security, and awakened to a sense of his sin and danger, is like the startled dove that rises on the wing. Has the Lord roused you? Has He startled you by showing you that you are lost? Beware of settling down again into apathy and indifference.

II. *The awakened sinner fleeing to Jesus.*

Let us consider some of the reasons that warn the dove to fly homeward.

(1.) *The shadows of evening beginning to come down.*

Doves fly homeward as night approaches. Few rural sights are more attractive than that of flocks of birds hastening to their nests when daylight wanes,—as when the crows in the still evening are preparing to settle in the lofty elms; or the grey-headed daws are speeding to roost in the ivy-covered cliffs overlooking the sea; or when the starlings are wheeling in circles before going to sleep; or the rock doves are hieing to the precipices, mantled with wild plants, amid which they have their nests.

Instinct teaches the birds not to tarry an hour

too long. They do not wait till the darkness actually falls. Be it ours to act in like manner, and to remember Christ's words, “The night cometh.” Are there not signs with us *that the day is closing?* What day? The day of priceless opportunity. And have you not many tokens that your day is speeding by, shown by the casualties of life; the loss, by the stroke of death, of the companions of your youth; the sudden disappearance of your darling child; the loneliness of conjugal bereavement; the sicknesses, sorrows, and disappointments of life; the grey hairs appearing on the forehead; the gathering on you of the infirmities of age? Do not all these warn you that the day of opportunity with you is fast and noiselessly wearing away? Once gone, the day will not return! All the might of the world—ay, of even the twelve legions of angels, whom Jesus spoke of in the garden of His sorrow—cannot open the door of life's opportunity when once that door is shut!

Beware of procrastination. Some time ago I was at St. Petersburg in Russia. It was in the depth of winter. Before commencing my mission-work, I was anxious to take a view of the city, and I repaired to the banks of the Neva, the noble river on which the capital is built. But I could not obtain a glimpse of it, for it was covered with clear ice, three feet in thickness, and the ice itself was carpeted with snow. I walked on the ice across the river. What struck

me was, that alongside of the quays there was a fleet of ships and steamers of all sizes, held fast in the ice. I suppose there were two hundred of them, all fixed and motionless. Were these ships there intentionally? Not one of them. They were held there, at great cost to their owners, at vast inconvenience to their officers and crews; nay, with no little risk to themselves from the pressure of the ice ever forming around them. Not one of these ships but had expected to be steering long ere that through the Baltic, or over more distant seas. Why then, were they there? It happened that in that winter¹ the frost had set in some days earlier than usual, and, by a little *undue delay*, all these ships were in one night caught, to be imprisoned from the latter part of October till the middle of May.

Ah! take you care, lest, with full intention to repent at some early time and turn to God, you allow your priceless opportunity to lapse, and you be unexpectedly gripped by Death's icy hand, and chained up *in your sins*, not for a lifetime merely, but for ever!

(2.) *The approach of the tempest.*

Before the hurricane there are commonly indications of the coming storm, such as the sighing and moaning of the wind, the fluttering of the leaves, unnatural stillness and sultriness of the atmosphere, sudden gusts, and the rack scudding through the

¹ 1880-81.

upper air. The instinct of the dove warns it of the approaching gale, as the Psalmist has it speaking of the dove, "the windy storm and tempest."¹ The mariner at sea is similarly weatherwise. He recognises by the tokens that a tempest is at hand. The pale yellow light on the horizon, the fitful squalls, the wild motions of sea-birds, the sudden lull or dead calm, the fall of the barometer in the saloon or companion, tell him that the hurricane is hurrying down. Instantly the sailors are sent aloft to take in canvas, to brail up, furl, or haul down the sails, brace and bring round the yards, lower the topmasts; orders are given to clear the decks of movable articles, to secure the boats from being swept overboard, and get them put in readiness for emergency, to make all fast and tight, so that the ship is ready for the outburst, and rides in safety through the cyclone.

Now, is there not a tempest ready to break on us, from which we all need shelter and protection? To what but such a tempest did John the Baptist, and Paul after him, refer when both spoke of the "wrath to come." Are the men of our day, who tell us there is no occasion for alarm, wiser than they? Have any of you as yet failed to recognise the signs of the approach of that dread hurricane? What are some of these? For one thing, there are many plain utterances in the Scriptures themselves,

¹ Psalm lv. 6-S.

on the subject of coming judgment. But have you not had tokens of another kind? Has not *conscience* made you quail? Have there not been at times blinding flashes of light within you, that have made you start and wince? Have not secret stings and arrows galled your spirit and wounded you? Have you not groaned under the pangs of remorse? Have not drops of liquid fire (as the great Greek,¹ though a heathen, describes) fallen on your bosom? Have you not been made over and over again to turn pale and tremble? Have you not at times, in your extremity of mental anguish, wished you were dead?

I believe there is no worldling, sceptic, or raving atheist, no ruthless and unprincipled despot, not even the heathen African, no man or woman so riotous or fallen, who has not at some time or other his qualms of conscience. What have you done with those sins that have again and again pierced your sensibilities? Have these sins been put away? Have they been pardoned? Are you sure they will trouble you no more? Have not long-buried and forgotten sins suddenly and without a moment's warning started up before you, and taken the spirit out of you? These fitful spasms of an uneasy conscience are themselves enough to rouse you to prepare for the coming danger, and to hasten your escape ere the horrible tempest burst on you.

¹ Æschylus (Agamemnon).

(3.) *The appearance of the bird of prey.*

The dove is a sweet morsel for the bird of prey, and, being utterly defenceless, has many enemies. When the bird of prey appears aloft in the distance, the dove waits not for further warning, but does its utmost to flee away. I remember, many years ago, when at Mount Sinai, and while standing in front of Horeb's granite precipice, observing a number of little birds hopping about and chirping in a stony valley. Suddenly there appeared eastward a large hawk, which with expanded and seemingly motionless wing swept towards the spot where the little chirpers were. The birds knew their mortal enemy full well. Their instinct told them that to rise in the air would be their destruction, so they became suddenly silent, and all cowered down beside the stones in the valley. As the hawk can only seize its prey while on the wing, the great bird, after vainly wheeling in circles over the spot for a time, turning westward, glided off behind the projecting cliff, and I saw it no more. Have we not to-day such a bird hovering above, with his keen eye resting on us, spreading his huge and dusky wings between us and the sun? What bird is that? It is Death! We are familiar with the cold, deep, and baleful shadow which this dread bird projects with his wings over the populations of earth, so that those who are in it are said to be in the region of the shadow of death.

Death, with quicker than the eagle's vision, has at this moment his eye on every one of us. Some who were eagerly looking forward to this very visit of mine have had their youthful eyes closed for ever, ere I have come.¹ He is waiting to swoop down and bear us in his talons ruthlessly away from loving kindred, from the busy city, from the crowded congregation. Every week some terrible calamity by land or sea shocks us with a lesson of the uncertainty of life. While at Vienna lately (November 1887), I visited the spot where the Ring Theatre took fire and was burned. I remember the stun we in a distant city received when the tidings came that seven hundred hapless human beings had within an hour in the blazing theatre become charred and almost unrecognisable corpses.

Death meets us when and where he is least expected. If you are heedless about yourselves, oh, think how suddenly death may carry off your children! See that they be converted in time. You may say, "But, do what we may, we cannot escape death."² True in one sense, but not in another. Does not Jesus say, "If a man keep my saying, he shall never taste of death;"³ and again, "Whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die;"³ "He that eateth of this bread shall live for ever"?⁴

¹ Nairn, *Mission to the Highlands*, 1886-87.

² John viii. 52.

³ John xi. 26.

⁴ John vi. 58.

But death is not the only bird of prey we have to fear. As the great Abyssinian traveller tells us there are birds that occupy loftier regions in the air and dominate over the scene ; so there is another bird, in our case, that takes a higher flight than death. He that has the power of death, that is the devil, “the prince of the power of the air” himself. Oh, do not wait till the terrible spoiler come, ere betaking yourself to the one strong refuge !

Now it is time to consider what that true refuge is. It is not enough that the sinner be awakened. It is of the last importance that he knows, and betakes himself to the one shelter where safety can be found. Are you sure that you have found it ? Many there are who are unhappy from a sense of sinfulness and danger, who make most melancholy mistakes as to the Divine method of deliverance. The great enemy employs many artifices, some very cunningly devised, to lead the sinner away from the true refuge. What is that refuge ? It is Christ—Christ crucified. It is the Rock of Ages¹ alone. There, and in its deep clefts,² the poor trembling dove, alarmed and pursued, finds security and rest. It is not by going about to establish your own righteousness, however scrupulously sincere, that you can find safety or possess true peace. It is only by wrapping your-

¹ See Isa. xxvi. 4, margin.

² Song of Sol. ii. 14.

selves up in the righteousness of another—and He the Son of God—that your guilty soul can find a covering, or your agitated heart attain to tranquillity and repose. Not till then shall you even begin to walk with God, or enter on a life of holiness and dutiful obedience.

In the wide prairies of America, the huntsmen go forth in quest of the wild animals inhabiting those regions. It sometimes happens that while the hunters have dismounted, and are taking their midday meal, or are smoking as they lie stretched on the ground, they descry an ominous appearance to windward. A dense and dark cloud is moving towards them along the plain with startling rapidity, and spires of flame rise high above the terrible cloud, while the noise of crackling vegetation strikes the ear. Through some incautious spark dropped elsewhere, the prairie has caught fire. Buffaloes, antelopes, and other wild animals rush past to avoid destruction. The huntsmen, exchanging looks, mount their horses and speed on, to outrun, if possible, the rapidly advancing flames. In order to escape, the hunters strain to reach some stream, or creek, as it is called, and put it, if broad enough, between them and the fire. When such a stream is interposed, the flames are checked, and the horsemen are safe, and it is by a stream being similarly interposed between you and the fiery cloud that your safety will be provided for. Blessed be God, though

such dividing streams are oft-times absent in the American plains, there is a stream broad and deep that runs from one end to the other of the prairie of this sin-blighted world. That river is no other than the stream of Immanuel's precious and atoning blood. If that blood be between you and God's retributive justice, then, like the blood sprinkled on the door-posts of Israel in Egypt, it will avail to shield you from death and danger, and the flame of Divine wrath will immediately subside. But let us suppose that there is no such creek or stream within reach of the huntsmen. What are they to do? Their horses being tired out and blown, the men dismount, and one of them, striking a match, applies it to the dry blades of grass at his feet. Gradually he succeeds in kindling a feeble flame. He blows on it with his lips, fans it with his cap, and soon the herbage before him is ablaze. And now, a little wind being produced by the kindled grass, the flame gathers strength and moves onward. The huntsmen are now between two fires,—the wild moving furnace behind them, and the blaze of burning herbage in front. But when the conflagration comes up, the hunters step forward on the blackened, and perhaps still smoking ground over which the fire they kindled has already passed. And so it is that the flames behind, having no longer any fuel to feed on, at once die down, and the huntsmen remain unharmed. Thus you see the deliverance

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of the huntsmen is affected by the space in front having been already scorched by the fire. Even so, it is because the fire of God's wrath has already passed on the person of Christ, because He has been made sin for us, and has been made a curse for us, that there is safety for all who, renouncing all other confidences, repair to Him alone. There is no salvation but by Christ. No one that I ever heard of offers to save us but Himself—"Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved;"¹ and no religion other than the Christian tells us of a saviour at all. Indeed, other religions do not even tell us that we need one. Christ is the Rock of Ages. Trifle not with your day of opportunity. Lose no time. To-morrow may prove too late.

When at Natal in 1883, I lodged in the house of a lady whose husband had perished some time before; and how? It was by a conflagration such as I have described, that suddenly seized the trees and herbage amid which he was working at the time. The flames came rapidly towards him, and he knew that his only expedient for escape was that of setting fire to the vegetation in front of him. But he was *too late*! The roaring flames made up to him while he was in the act of kindling the fire, and ere the ground before him could be cleared,

¹ Acts iv. 12.

by being only a minute or so too late, he was scorched, and died in agony! This I heard from the widow herself.

“Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.”¹

III. *The convinced sinner, weary and at the mouth of the cleft of safety.*

It not infrequently happens that the sinner convinced of sin, when brought to the cleft in the rock, refuses or hesitates to enter. It is as if the dove, having reached the rock after its long flight, instead of folding its wings and passing into the crevice, were to perch on some twig or jutting projection at the entrance, and were to flutter about, unwilling for some reason to go in. Why is this? Is it because the cruel snake has crept up the rock, and is coiled within the crevice, its forked tongue vibrating, and its fascinating eye watching for the prey on its return? Or is it the leer of the cunning fox that has descended into the cleft from above, which the dove detects, and that scares the little bird away? Ah well, let me tell you, sinner, who are hesitating, you are scared from the Lord Jesus without any just cause for alarm. Alas! there may be not a few now listening to me who are most unhappy. They are convinced of sin; they know full well all the doctrines of grace, that there is no other Saviour but Jesus. Yet they have

¹ 2 Cor. vi. 2.

no comfort, no peace ; and Christ, after all, seems to be nothing to them. They are at the very entrance of salvation, but for some false reason they hesitate, they cannot decide, they scruple to enter in. They cannot make up their minds to confide in the Lord Jesus for their personal salvation, and they are living useless lives while the world is crying aloud for their aid.

Let me give rein here for a few moments to my imagination. What is that I see rolling on the face of the dark and troubled waters ? A strange craft ! It should be a ship, yet it has nothing about it that characterizes a ship,—no mast, no sail, no sheet, no oar, no rudder, no deck, no ladder, no cable, no anchor, no steersman, no sailor, no captain, no port-hole, no boat, no flag. As I look, I see high in the air a little bird flying rapidly towards the craft. It makes its way to what I had not noticed before, a sort of window in the sloping roof of the strange vessel. The window is open, and the little bird is about to enter. But how is this ? The dove suddenly hesitates and halts. The little bird perches, now on the lintel of the window, now on the covered roof close by. It flutters about, it flutters about, it flutters about, but will not go in. A venerable face and head appear at the window. It is Noah himself, whose name means “rest.” The patriarch speaks : “My little dove, thou art weary, weary. Why not come in ?” The

dove looks wistfully, as if it would say, "Yes, I am weary, flying during the long day over the dark and interminable waters, and not finding any rest for the sole of my foot. I feel as if I must fall into the waters and be drowned." "Then why not come in?" But the bird flutters about, flutters about, flutters about, and will not enter. And now I perceive that Noah from one side cautiously reaches forth his hand, and quickly grasps the dove. "And Noah took her, and pulled her in unto him into the ark."¹ Then he folds the dove to his breast, and, stroking its feathers, closes the window. Stepping backward he descends, and calls for Shem, Ham, and Japheth, and the four ladies. "Here is our little bird come back to us again," he says; and all the seven take up the dove in succession, making some remark about it. Then, being let go, the bird flies upward to its nest amid the rafters of the ark.

Now, you are like that dove to-day. You, too, have come to-day to the very window of the ark, and are weary enough with sin and sorrow, with wandering, waiting, and dispeace. But, instead of entering the ark of refuge, you flutter about! flutter about! flutter about! Who is He that so benignly looks at you from the window? It is the true "Noah" Himself—"the Rest for the weary." Listen to His pathetic voice as it sounds over the deep. "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are

¹ Gen viii. 9.

heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Ah, rest ! Rest is what you need. Well, this day decide to accept of Christ, to make Him your own, to take Him at His word, and to place in Him your personal confidence. I ask you earnestly, cannot you, will not you, put your trust in Him to-day ? You say, "I will try to do so." "Try" will not avail. "Well, I will trust in Him." "Will trust" won't do either. Say, Lord, by the grace of God, I *do* trust in Thee now. Let this be the last day of your hesitation, of your indecision. You have waited uselessly for years, expecting some sign of fitness in yourself, some warrant to encourage you, other than Christ's word. Why should you hold aloof, either by harbouring suspicion of Christ's willingness to save you, or by vainly waiting till you can bring some worthiness of your own to recommend you to Him ? May the gracious arm of the Lord be now stretched out, and amid your fluttering fetch you in. And will the Lord Jesus not fold you to His heart ? Nay, He will show you as His own to the angels, and bid them rejoice with Him over your recovery. Yea, more, will He not confess your name before His Father ? and there will be gladness indeed throughout all the Father's house. Jesus will rejoice over you with joy ; the angels will rejoice over you ; and God the Father will rejoice over you. It will be as in the father's house in the parable when the long-lost prodigal came home.

One thing remains to be said. Isaiah does not in our verse to-day speak of one dove, but of a multitude. It is a "cloud" of doves, with wings outspread, which, in the light of prophecy, he sees flying to their windows, or houses. Now the conversion of even one sinner is a precious and notable event; but we look for the conversion, not of one, but of many. Let me say that even if one sinner be awakened, repent, and be forgiven, we may reasonably expect that soon other conversions will take place, either in the family or in the congregation.

Have you not, while standing behind a low wall, observed a flock of birds feeding among the stubble in the field? They busily pick up seed or other food, heedless of your gaze. Suddenly one bird rises in the air. The others pay no regard, but continue feeding. Soon another rises, and then another, and then, as if one impulse had on the instant seized them all, the whole covey rise together, and with a whirring noise speed away beyond the field to find food elsewhere.

The five disciples, John, Andrew, Peter, Philip, and Nathanael, rose one by one at Jordan; but in a little while the three thousand at Pentecost, roused by one of them, rose at once as a flock of doves, whose wings were covered with silver, and their feathers with yellow gold,¹ and, following their example, were gathered in. So may it be again. If

¹ Psalm lxviii. 13.

only one or two of you were to-day to decide for Jesus, and find peace in believing, we might expect that from these pews there would arise a whole flock of anxious sinners.

When lately in Londonderry, I spoke from this text, putting the matter in this light. A fine young man of nineteen, impressed by what he heard, was going homeward, when a friend, who along with him had listened to the sermon, urged him to receive Christ Jesus. He did so there and then. Writing to me three weeks afterwards, he said that that night he had been born again on the way, and that now eleven persons in his neighbourhood had found the Lord, and that others had been awakened. Let one or two of you receive Jesus, and then others, your companions, will take heart and hope, so that this day might be as the beginning of days among you, and a whole multitude be gathered home. Amen.

V.

GOD IS LOVE.

"God is love."—I JOHN iv. 8-16.

IN that beautiful house of many mansions which God has erected as a home for His people on earth—I refer to the Holy Scriptures—two inimitable pictures of the Lord of the building are hung on the walls, by looking at which we acquire our best idea of the character of God. These are the Law of God and the Gospel of Christ—the Law and the Gospel. Now, what is the sum and fulfilment of the Law? Is it not "Thou shalt love"? All that God requires of us is "love." And what is the sum of the Gospel? Is it not "God so loved," so loved the world? The fount and spring of Redemption is love; the Law is love; the Gospel is love; "God is love;" "his nature and his name is love."

Do you ask where and in what it is that the love of God is most clearly and wondrously revealed? The apostle, in the words now before us, replies, "God is love. In this was manifested the love

of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins."

Some time ago our astronomers were desirous of making researches into the nature and structure of the sun; and, for their purpose, they despatched many competent parties to different regions of the globe, in order to take observations of the great luminary, and scrupulously to record the results. Strange to say, the critical opportunity selected by them for gaining insight into the structure of the orb of light was that afforded during the few moments of total eclipse. The brief season of entire obscuration of the sun was found better than any other for attaining their object. So it is with the Divine love. Would we know the qualities and intensity of that love, we must conduct our inquiries at the place, and at the time when the Father's face was hid from the Son of His love; when, in the deep gloom of Calvary, the Son of God was made a propitiation for our sins, and that cry rang through the darkness, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" It is in the Cross, where our great substitute died for the guilty, where, to use the emphatic language of Scripture, Christ "was made a curse for us," that we acquire our best acquaintance with the "great love" of God.

Our theme is so vast that we must be content with merely touching its border. Let me consider now some of the aspects under which the Divine love is set forth in Scripture.

1. *Pity.*—Pity is love as it looks on the wretched, the miserable, the forlorn, the self-deceived, the out-cast, the ruined and undone. “Have pity upon me, have pity upon me, O ye my friends ;” cried Job from among the ashes ; “for the hand of God hath touched me.” Elisha’s tears for the miseries of his country, as he gazed on the cruel countenance of Hazael, were tears of pity. “Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him. For he knoweth our frame ; he remembereth that we are dust.” It was with this pitying love that Jesus looked on the young ruler who came with breathless haste to knock at the strait gate, but who went away sorrowful without entering it, because he could not make up his mind to sell the world and follow Jesus. “Jesus,” it is said, “beholding him, loved him.” It is of this love of pity that God gives such startling and pathetic expression in the words, “As I live, saith the LORD GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked ; but that the wicked turn from his way and live : turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways ; for why will ye die, O house of Israel ?” Perhaps the most affecting illustration of Divine pity is that given on the slope of Olivet, when Jesus on the ass’s colt, “was

come near and beheld the city," all unconscious of its coming doom, and wept over it, saying, "If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes."

2. *Compassion*.—Akin to the aspect of pity is that of compassion. Compassion includes pity, and something more. It implies a purpose to deliver. "I will have compassion," saith the Lord at Sinai, "on whom I will have compassion." When the leper, exiled from wife, children, home, and synagogue, came kneeling, and cried, "If thou wilt, thou canst make me clean. And Jesus, moved with compassion, put forth his hand, and touched him, and saith unto him, I will; be thou clean." When, at the gate of Nain, the widow was following her only son as he was being carried to the grave, and much people of the city were with her, "the Lord saw her, and had compassion on her, and said unto her, Weep not." Then, touching the bier, He said, "Arise;" and at once her lost boy sprang into his astonished mother's arms. So, when the man out of whom the legion of devils was cast prayed the Lord that he might be with Him, Jesus suffered him not, but said to him, "Go home to thy friends, and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee, and hath had compassion on thee." But beyond all question, the most wonderful illustration of the love of compassion is that given us in the ever-memorable words, "For God

so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”

3. *Spontaneous Outflow.*—Allied to compassion is that sovereign and mysterious love for which I have no name but spontaneous outflow, which, issuing from the Divine bosom, grasps its objects lying in the depths of sin and misery, and bears them upward through faith to glory, as is expressed in the words, “Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love ; therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee.”

4. *Grace.*—Grace is the Divine love bestowing blessing on those who have no claim on its benefits. Grace is love giving *gratis*, for nothing, without money and without price. So it is said, “I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious.” “By grace are ye saved.” “To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved : in whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace.” “The grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus.” “By the grace of God I am what I am.” Perhaps the most touching illustration of grace is given us in the words, “For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich.”

5. *Mercy.*—Mercy differs from grace in that, while

grace is Divine love bestowing favour on those who are without claim to its benefits, mercy is Divine love extending forgiveness to the guilty, and to the condemned in law. Mercy is Divine love imparting blessing to those who are objects of wrath. On this account it is that no aspect of the Divine love is, in the first instance, so attractive to the sinner as that of mercy. The sinner, with his hand, first touches the love of God under the aspect of mercy. "Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? he retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy." "Who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief." "That he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy."

Would you know what mercy can accomplish, turn to the opening verses of the second chapter of the Epistle to the Ephesians, and read, "You hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins; wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others. But God, who is rich in mercy"—

When I read these words, I am reminded of the effects of the ebbing tide on some parts of our island shores. As the waters of the deep retire, the pebbly strand is exposed. Soon the nakedness of the beach becomes apparent. Boulders, shingle, sands, and shells are laid bare ; then rocks slippery with seaweed, stones mantled with flabby marine vegetation come into view. As the tide still recedes, an unpicturesque expanse of mud and slime, with worm casts and fragments of green wreck, widens to the eye, till far out the black thongs and dark olive fronds of the oar-weed, or tangle, as we call it, oscillate and play on the edge of the sea. Such is the comparison that occurs to me, as I ponder the gradual but terrible disclosure of human depravity and ruin which the apostle makes in these verses. "Dead in trespasses and sins." Walking in sins "according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience : among whom we all had our conversation in times past, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind ;" then winding up with the awful announcement, "And were by nature the children of wrath, even as others."

Now, mark the change. Hark ! listen to the whisperings of the returning sea. When man is helpless to deliver, God speaks. "But God"—Divine sovereignty asserts its glorious prerogative

—"But God, who is rich in mercy." Mercy it is which constitutes the flowing tide. The rippling but resistless waters now glide in, streaming through the tiny furrows in the sand previously occasioned by the retiring sea,—onward, and still onwards the wavelets with their soft music come, gradually increasing in size, curving with graceful arch, their tint like emerald, their crests like snow. Soon the grim oar-weed disappears. The desert of slime and mud is covered. The stones and slippery rocks are submerged. As the tide rolls in, the sands and shells and shingle vanish from the eye, and now the flood is at its height. The jubilant waters thunder on the beach, and where was lately a wilderness of emptiness and confusion is now a liquid mirror in which the sun and blue heavens glass themselves. Is it not so here? "Children of wrath, even as others. But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved)." Still the waters rise,—“And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.” And now the glorious tide is at its full,—“That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace, in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus.”

Under the multitudinous waves of Divine mercy, the unrighteousness of all sinners, who in Christ

take hold of it, sinks from view. What mean we by that mercy? It is the overwhelming efficacy of Christ's atoning blood that is represented by it. “I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember *no more.*” Ah! my friends as yet unsaved, edge up, I beseech of you, towards this mercy. If you shrink from touching God's holy love under every other aspect, take courage and lay hold of it under that of mercy. With your eye on the Lamb that died—for only in Him can you find this mercy—cry like the publican, “God be merciful to me a sinner.” Your sins, mighty as the Alps or Carpathian Mountains, can find their match in the ocean depths of the mercy of God.

“O Love, thou bottomless abyss,
My sins are swallowed up in thee;
Covered is mine unrighteousness,
Nor spot of guilt remains on me,
While Jesus' blood through earth and skies,
Mercy—free, boundless—mercy cries.”

6. *Forbearance and Longsuffering.*—These aspects of Divine love differ from mercy in that their objects are not merely guilty, but persist in provocation, and are obstinate in rebellion. Few aspects of Divine love are more astonishing than these. “Despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering?” Even the vessels of wrath are “endured with much longsuffering.” “The Lord . . . is longsuffering to usward, not

willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." "The longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah." How long did it wait? Till the Church of God was reduced to the dimensions of a single family. If the promise of the continuance of a Church on earth was to be kept, that longsuffering, in the nature of things, could be protracted no longer. Think of God's longsuffering with His ancient people! Not till they had rejected God the Father, crucified the Son, and done despite to the Holy Ghost did He withdraw from them. And when He did so, with what a piercing lamentation: "I have forsaken mine house, I have left mine heritage; I have given the dearly beloved of my soul into the hand of her enemies." "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, . . . how often would I have gathered thee!" Ah! and is He waiting to take them in again? It was to illustrate God's longsuffering that Paul ascribes his conversion. "Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might shew forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting."

7. *Readiness to Forgive.*—"Thou, Lord, art good, and ready to forgive." Readiness to forgive is distinguished from mercy in that mercy is Divine love bestowing pardon on those who are judicially under condemnation for rebellion against God as a sovereign; but readiness to forgive is love

yearning to blot out personal offences. Love it was under this aspect that glowed in the heart of the father in the parable, when he saw his prodigal child yet a great way off, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck and kissed him. It was this love that turned its melting eye on Peter on his repeated denial of his Master in the hall of Caiaphas, and sent him forth in tears. This love it was which from the Cross cried, “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do;” and which afterwards at Pentecost stretched forth its arm from ascension glory, to gather to salvation three thousand of its mortal adversaries.

8. *Condescending Kindness.*—Condescending kindness is love stooping to raise up those who are of low estate. It has for its objects the insignificant, the illiterate, the poverty-stricken, the lonely, the feeble, the friendless, the forsaken, the fallen. It speaks a word in season to him that is weary. It is the stay of the widow, the fatherless, the stranger; and its voice encourages the little child. Condescending kindness raises up the poor out of the dust, and lifts the beggar from the dunghill, and sets them among princes. Condescending kindness bent its ear to listen to the moan of the boy Ishmael as he lay gasping under the bush in the wilderness. It cast its eye on the babe Moses as he wept in the ark of bulrushes by the Nile. Condescending kindness took up in its arms the

little children beyond Jordan, put its hands on them, and blessed them. "I will betroth thee unto me in righteousness, . . . and in lovingkindness." "Thy lovingkindness is better than life."

9. *Bountifulness*.—"The Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him." He feeds the ravens when they cry. The young lions seek their meat from God. He openeth His hand liberally, and nourishes the creeping things of the sea ; ay, He clothes the very lilies of the field.

Bountifulness sustained with manna two and a half millions of people in an inhospitable desert for forty years. The fainting multitudes that followed Jesus by the lake it satisfied with bread. It turned the water into wine at the marriage at Cana. "Goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life." "The Lord God is a sun and shield : the Lord will give grace and glory : no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly." "My God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus." "If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink. He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water." And, most wonderful of all, "I am the bread of life : he that cometh to me shall never hunger ; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst. . . . I am the living bread which came down from heaven : if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever : and

the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.”

10. *Complacency.*—Once more, the Divine love appears under the aspect of complacency. Complacency is love finding its rest and delight in that which is like itself. God can have no complacency in the wicked, in an unconverted and Christless man. With the love of complacency God contemplates the elect angels who have kept their first estate. With this love He regards those who have been washed in the blood of the Lamb, and are clothed with the mantle of Immanuel’s righteousness. With this love He looks on those in whom the image of God has been restored. With this love Jesus loved Martha, Mary, and Lazarus. Of it He speaks when He says, “I love them that love me; and those that seek me early shall find me.” And again, in that glorious promise, “He that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him.” With this complacency God now “rests in his love,” as He will hereafter rest in His redeemed for ever and ever.

One love this is, under many names: Pity, Compassion, Sovereign and Spontaneous Outflow, Grace, Mercy, Forbearance and Longsuffering, Readiness to Forgive, Condescending Kindness, Bountifulness, Complacency,—one love under many names, according to the circumstances of those who, at the time, are the objects of it.

It reminds me of what I must be allowed to call the most beautiful river in the world, the mighty stream that flows between the United States and the British possessions on the American continent. This river takes its rise I know not in what exact region of the remote north, nor under what name it is first known; but after it has pursued for a time an obscure course, all at once we come on it as forming the queen of lakes, the largest expanse of fresh-water on the face of the globe. Then, under a new name, it finds outlet by a goodly channel. Then it develops into another lake of astonishing magnitude, distinguished by a wild Indian name. From thence, under another title, it rushes in rapid stream, in colour blue as the azure sky overhead, and, with a new designation, makes its way to form a smaller lake. From this, by another name, it rushes through a narrow channel, to expand afresh into a vast inland sea, with its appropriate title. Thence, under a peculiar name, it rolls onward as a broad and beautiful river, calm and majestic, but altered in tint. Then, all at once and without warning, the placid stream is caught in the rapids. Suddenly convulsed and thrown into tumult, it starts away with the velocity of a frightened steed. Rushing with headlong impetuosity to the precipice, it flings over it a world of waters, that, here in colour green like the beryl, there white as the foam on the ocean, descends in swirling folds. The

mighty mass is embraced as it falls by the ascending clouds of spray, and is lightened by the brilliant hues of the rainbow to the dark and seething cauldron beneath. Who does not now recognise Niagara, as it thunders down, the grandest cataract on the face of the globe?

Soon the river steals silently away between its steep and wooded banks, and after gliding past the dread whirlpool, from which there is no escape, it widens into another inland sea, on whose borders great cities smile, and now it is known by an imposing name, which gives designation to all the province. Narrowing again, it sweeps through a paradise of beauty, and is called the Lake of the Thousand Isles. Thereafter, speeding on as river, rapid, and lake, each distinguished by its own name, it prosecutes its way, till after a course unequalled in character by any other stream, it launches its glad waters on the limitless Atlantic—one river all the while, known under many names, given to it according to the territory through which it happens to be flowing at the time.

So is it with the river of the love of God. That river takes its rise in the secret depths of the heart of God, whence it issues by its grand outlet, Christ Jesus, the only begotten Son which is in the bosom of the Father. Then we come on it as the wide expanse of Divine Pity; then as the rapid channel of Divine Compassion; then as the mysterious stream

of Sovereign Outflow ; then we follow it as the tranquil river of Divine Grace ; then we find ourselves gazing on the lake, broad and deep, of Divine Mercy ; then we discover it making its way through a peculiarly unpromising territory, and recognise it as the river of God's Forbearance and Longsuffering ; then we behold it, as it thunders down in cataract, as God's Readiness to Forgive ; then we witness it gliding smoothly beneath as the river of God's Condescending Kindness ; then we see it stream through its verdant paradise of a thousand isles, and know it as the river of Divine Bountifulness ; and thereafter, with straining eyes, we follow it winding serenely away, as the river of Divine Complacency, till its waters disappear in the ocean of Eternity.

At which of the windings of this pure river of the water of life do I find you standing to-day ? Surely at some spot along its wondrous stream you might find a place from whence with joy to draw the water of salvation !

The river of the love of God has been pursuing its way through this sin-blighted earth for thousands of years. It is gliding now through the continents of the world. It is coursing through our own land at this moment. It is sweeping through our city. It is pouring its waters through the ordinances of God's house to-day. It is flowing on at our feet, though, alas ! by multitudes it is still unrecognised and unknown.

Like that great river of Southern Africa which promises to prove the highway for commerce, civilization, and Christianity through the southern interior of the dark continent, but whose mighty flow and stupendous cataract remained unknown to the inhabitants of Europe, Asia, and America, nay, except to the dwellers on its banks, to those of Africa itself, till Livingstone the explorer, only a few years ago, for the first time revealed its existence to mankind,—this river of the love of God has been rolling, during all these ages since man was on the earth, though the mass of mankind has failed to discern its beneficent stream.

Oh, may God by His Holy Spirit open our eyes, lest this river of blessing should be passing our very habitations, and we, dying in ignorance of its existence, perish in our sins!

For let no one imagine that from the greatness of the love of God there will be no punishment in reserve in the future for the impenitent. The very fact that God has given His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, affords an alarming token that those who reject God's Son assuredly will perish. God is love, but His moral government must be maintained. It is enough for us that He has provided for us and has revealed a golden gateway by which sinners of every name are invited to enter and come to the Father. It is by His Son that God will have us

approach Him. It is at our peril if we neglect and refuse Him. "I am the way, and the truth, and the life," Christ tells us Himself: "*no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.*"

Some there are in our own day who persuade themselves that God is too merciful to inflict retribution on the wicked, and others there are who indulge in dreams of repentance after death. We certainly are not judges of what it becomes the Infinite and Almighty to do in His universe. With regard to hope of salvation after death, for those who die impenitent here, I have simply to remark:

1. That not one encouragement is given in the entire Bible to expect repentance in another world.

2. That there is not one example given to us in God's Word of any one being converted and saved after death.

3. That, though the Scripture abounds with invitations to repent, and holds out hope of pardon for transgressors here, not one of these invitations reaches beyond the tomb. God's invitations, which are stored up so plenteously in the quiver of His Word, all fall short, like *spent arrows*, on this side of the grave. Not one is there that finds its way to the other side.

4. The whole Bible seems to be constructed on the idea that *life* is for us our grand, our *one* opportunity. "The door" is standing open now. When once "shut," it opens not again.

5. No one speaks so often about future retribution as the Lord Jesus. In the Gospel of Matthew alone there are about thirty-three references to punishment in the future.

6. The difficulties in reconciling punishment in the future world as inflicted by God, who is love, are to be met with under God's administration now, in this present world.

It is not for us to speculate on what it is becoming the great Jehovah to do. Let us leave the future with the Lord. Our part is to comply now with His invitation, and to embrace the Gospel of His Son, so as by Him to return to God. Be it ours to remember God's sublime declaration of His name, while announcing His pardoning mercy: "The LORD, The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty." Let me plead with any of you who may not yet have turned, to come by Jesus Christ to the saving possession and enjoyment of the great love of God. It is in the Cross of Christ that you meet this love, and where to-day you may enter into peace, finding reconciliation to God.

To take another figure than that of the river, the Bible may be compared to a prism through which we may see the white light of the love of God. We have seen how the heavenly light has been refracted,

and appears as so many beautiful rays of Divine hue. But if you ask me where all these refracted rays of the Divine love are brought again into focus, I reply it is at the Cross of Christ, that the Divine love in all its aspects is displayed.

Do not say that the love of God is a theme too great for your comprehension, and so turn from it listlessly away. Do not excuse yourself from the contemplation of it, because it is a subject so infinite, so boundless. All the love of God, in all its aspects, is to be found in His Son. Is it not written, "This is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent"? Have you not read that in Christ "dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily," and that it hath "pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell"? All the love of God is held forth for your acceptance in the person of His Son. Now, Christ is brought nigh to you to-day in the offer of the Gospel. Only receive Christ by faith, *i.e.*, put all your trust in Him, and all the paradise of God's love, in all its aspects and fulness, shall be your own. "For this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son."

Oh, how rich and how winning are the representations in Scripture of the power of this love! Take, for example, the one truth of forgiveness of sin.

"As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us."

He casts "all our sins into the depths of the sea."

He blots out our transgressions. He annihilates them like a "thick cloud," and will remember our iniquities no more.

Listen to Him,—“Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.”

Nay, and if these were not enough, He washes us, and makes us "whiter than snow."

He casts all our sins behind His back.

And when the iniquity of believing Israel "shall be sought for, there shall be none; and the sins of Judah, and they shall not be found."

Oh, these are good words about forgiveness! What is to become of you, if you are not forgiven? Your sins, depend upon it, will gather around you and hopelessly swallow you up, and you will be lost. Trifle not with the great love of God as it is exhibited in the Gospel, nor tamper with its urgent appeals! Assuredly, in proportion to the grace which you neglect, reject, and despise, will be your retribution at last.

In the opening of the Book of Proverbs, the great love of God, under the name of "Wisdom," is represented as the most indefatigable of friends, in passionate earnestness hastening from one place in the city to another, like one in agony of concern, to warn and to entreat the sinner to repent.

This great love of God is represented, like Jonah,

as appearing all alone in the midst of the city. Her beautiful robe whiter than that of angels, she stands at the entrance of the merchants' exchange, in the doorway of the assemblies. She is, at early morn, at the opening of the gates ; and, in the evening, she stands at each man's door and knocks. With ineffable pity she pursues the giddy throng of bold revilers, the ignorant, and wise and prudent in their own conceits. She flits in her radiant apparel from place to place, her eyes, as at Olivet, running down with tears, her voice shrill and penetrating, and ringing in the conscience of the hearer, "Turn ye, turn ye, why will ye die?" "Turn you, . . . behold, I will pour out my spirit unto you." But the infatuation of the sinners is complete. They hurry from the majestic form that, with tones melting and pathetic, is following them. But let us listen to the Scripture itself.

"Wisdom crieth without ;
She uttereth her voice in the streets ;
In the openings of the gates :
In the city she uttereth her words,
How long, ye simple ones,
Will ye love simplicity ?
And the scorers delight in their scorning,
And fools hate knowledge ?
Turn you at my reproof :
Behold, I will pour out my spirit unto you,
I will make known my words unto you."

Now, observe the awful retribution that follows contemptuous neglect of all this.

"Because I have called, and ye refused ;
I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded ;
But ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none
of my reproof ;
I also will laugh at your calamity ;
I will mock when your fear cometh ;
When your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction
cometh as a whirlwind ;
When distress and anguish cometh upon you."

Ah ! what is this ? When these thoughtless sinners, refusing to listen, hasten out of hearing, the great love of God, Divine Wisdom, turning sorrowfully but indignantly away, addresses the bystanders near, who seemingly are horrified at the scene, and so the majestic Speaker, pointing to the infatuated triflers, proceeds :

"Then shall they call upon me,
But I will not answer ;
They shall seek me early,
But they shall not find me :
For that they hated knowledge,
And did not choose the fear of the LORD :
They would none of my counsel ;
They despised all my reproof :
Therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way,
And be filled with their own devices.
For the turning away of the simple shall slay them,
And the prosperity of fools shall destroy them.
But whoso hearkeneth unto me shall dwell safely,
And shall be quiet from fear of evil."

Amen.

VI.

CHRIST THE UNSEEN.

“Jesus Christ: whom having not seen, ye love; in whom though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.”—1 PET. i. 7, 8.

PART I.

THE persons to whom these words were originally addressed had been, still were, and had the prospect of continuing to be, in great affliction. “Now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations:” yet, strange to say, they were at the same time participants in a gladness that can be considered no other than sublime. “Ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory”!

As a cottage on a cliff, lashed by the rain and beaten by the tempest, may at the moment be the abode of contentment, and ring with hilarity within, so these Christians, even while assailed by tribulation and persecution manifold, had a heart glowing with Divine affections, and a bosom brimming over with irrepressible happiness. What renders the case more remarkable is, that the object which had power so wonderfully to move them was one which

they did not see, which they never had seen, and never were on earth to see. That unseen object was the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. "Jesus Christ: whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory."

Let us notice some features of the Christian character associated with Christ the Unseen, though before doing so we may consider what the general attitude of Christians should be towards Christ the Unseen.

It is evident from the animated language of the apostle, that he, and those to whom he wrote, regarded the Lord Jesus, though unseen, as a living and loving friend. In the case of many, Christianity as a doctrinal system rather than Christ as a person, is the theme that almost exclusively occupies them. It was not so with these "strangers scattered" over the provinces of Asia Minor.

Though unseen by the natural eye, Jesus was ever present to the eyes of their heart; though screened from vision by the blue drapery of heaven, behind that veil He was to them a fountain of unutterable joy; though never on earth to be beheld by them, He was loved with an attachment so clinging that they would have parted with all the world a thousand times over, rather than have let Him go.

To aid our conceptions here, let us think of those

men who pursue their daily avocations beneath the surface of the earth. These persons descend the long shaft of the mine and traverse extensive galleries underground. No light has the miner but that of the flickering lamp he carries with him. On whichever side he turns, nothing meets his eye but black, bare, and dripping strata of hard rock. No sound strikes his ear but the click of his own pickaxe, the crash of the *débris* he has dislodged, the roar of the distant powder-blast, or the rumble of the waggons elsewhere conveying the mineral along the caverns. Yet well the miner knows that all the while, the sun is shining overhead, that the lark is carolling in the sky, that the daisy and wild rose are smiling on the lea, that the hawthorn and apple tree are in blossom, that the bee is humming amidst the woodbine, that the ploughman or the reaper is in the field, that the team is passing along the highway, that the breeze is making music with the trees around his dwelling, that his wife is busily preparing the evening meal, and that his little children are either at school or are merrily playing about his cottage door. Of all this, neither eye nor ear at the time takes cognizance, yet the man is quite aware that all is as I have described, and so he contentedly prosecutes his toil till evening hour, when, his ear catching the distant signal, he drops his implements, hurries to the shaft, where his light-hearted companions are awaiting his arrival, and

stepping into the iron cradle, he gives sign to the engine-man above, and is drawn up again into the pleasant light of day.

Now, I admit there is a great difference between the case of the miner and our own. The man underground has seen what is above him, whereas we have never seen what is above us ; still, the illustration may show what our attitude of mind should be towards Christ the Unseen. Beyond that firmament of clear atmosphere and starry sky the Lord Jesus sits. His benignant countenance we cannot see, the music of His voice we cannot hear. Listen as we may, we cannot detect His footfall as He crosses the sapphire pavement of heaven, yet is it most true that He is seated yonder. His loving eye is now scanning all things. He is looking down on us at this moment, and is wondering whether any, or how many, who hitherto have been strangers to Him, will give their hearts to Him to-day.

Now, as to the features of Christian character, let me speak of,

I. *Love to Christ the Unseen.*

Why do Christians love Christ ? They have every reason for loving Him. They love Him because He is "altogether lovely." The Lord Jesus possesses every perfection of an immaculate humanity ; but, more than this, He is Divine. "In him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily." See how His

divinity shines out in the language before us : "Joy unspeakable and *full of glory*." Could ever joy founded on merely human relationship be said to be full of glory ? But only admit Christ Jesus to be Divine, and no description of that joy could be more appropriate.

They love Him because in His offices of love towards them He is all-attractive. Is He not Jesus Christ our Righteousness, Jesus Christ our Life, Jesus Christ our Hope, our Peace, our Strength, our Inheritance, our Eternal Salvation ?

Over and above all this, they love Him, not merely for what He is, for what He was, for what He is doing for them, and for what He will do, but they love Him very specially for what *He has done*. That which affects them, perhaps more than anything else, is, that He came into the world to seek them, to save them, to die for them—He died for His enemies ! His was the inexplicable love that induced Him to lay down His life for His enemies ; to become the substitute at the bar of judgment for His enemies ; to pay the awful debt to justice ; to endure anguish, ignominy, and shame ; and to undergo a malefactor's death—and all for His enemies. Not only to be made sin,—though He knew no sin,—but to be made a curse for His enemies, to give up His own inestimable life in order to secure eternal life for His enemies ! He died for His enemies. This is love which they can never forget ; nay, which they cannot fathom nor understand.

He loved me, says one, and gave Himself for me. I hated Him ; He loved me. I persecuted Him ; He gave Himself for me. I was a persecutor, a blasphemer, and injurious ; I was His arch enemy and His implacable foe. I tried to raise all the world against Him. I would have torn His name out of the bosom of every follower He had. I would have trampled that name with execration in the dust, that it should never be heard of again ; and yet all the while "He loved me," and in the view of all I was to do for Him "He gave himself for me." He died for me ! He took my feet from the miry clay ; He drew me from the dismal pit ; He plucked me from the lion's mouth ; He snatched me from the jaws of hell. The Lord has pardoned all my sins. He has hurled my iniquities like burning mountains into the ocean depths of His atoning blood ; He has regenerated me ; He has justified me ; He has healed me ; He has saved me ! He has placed me on the Rock of Ages ; He has set my steps in the way to heaven. He has given me eternal life. "He has redeemed me, He has redeemed me, He has redeemed me !" What friend have I ever had like the Lord Jesus ? Who ever loved me as He has done ? Not my father, not my mother, not my spouse, not my brother, not my child, not the nearest and dearest I have ever known. Who but Himself ever laid down His life for me, or would have thought of doing so ? And shall I

not love Him? Shall I not cast aside the sword and shield of my rebellion? Nay, shall I not consecrate my energies, my soul, my entire being to Him, and live to bring others, like myself repentant, to His feet? Ah! "I count all things but loss, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord." The love of Christ constraineth me. Whether I live, I live unto the Lord; and whether I die, I die unto the Lord: whether I live therefore, or die, I am the Lord's. "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me."

I pause to inquire whether you love Christ? Either you love Him or you love Him not. To those who know they do not love Him, I would say, no quality in you can prove a substitute for love to Christ. To aver you have done no harm to your fellow-men will not avail. However amiable, moral, and benevolent you may be, this will not suffice if you love not Jesus. It is written in the New Testament, "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema Maran-atha." No threatening in the Old Testament is more dreadful than this. Young men, do you love Christ? Young women, do you love Christ? Perhaps you say you do love Christ; but, such is the deceitfulness of the human heart, that some imagine they love Christ

who love Him not. Let me test your love by one question. You say you possess love to Christ. My question is, Does love to Christ *possess you*? You know what it is to be possessed by the love of some earthly object,—the love of man, woman, or little child, or of pleasure or money,—and how that love may haunt you day and night. Now, did love to Christ ever exert such a commanding influence over you?

If, however, you love Christ indeed, you have received a priceless boon. Love to Christ is a grace to which the most sublime promises are made, as when Christ said, “He that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him;” and again, “If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him.” And more than this, love to Christ raises the soul above all the evils of life, and enables it to extract benefit from them all.¹

As I have paced by the seashore, I have observed the nets of the fisherman spread on the beach. Along one side of the cordage, at regular intervals, weights of lead or of stone are attached. The object of this is evident. Were these weights not affixed, the net when flung on the waters would idly float on the surface, and the fisher would fail in securing his spoil. The weights serve to take down the net

¹ Rom. viii. 28.

perpendicularly, and to expand its meshes for the capture. But if the net had only weights attached to it, the whole cordage would be carried to the bottom. Accordingly, the fisherman is careful to attach to the opposite side of the net, at similar intervals, floats, either of cork or of some more buoyant material ; and thus it is that when the net is let down into the sea the weights distend it to the utmost, while the floats keep the entire fabric abreast of the waves. Even should a stiff breeze be on the waters, the cordage gracefully rises and falls with the swell of the sea. Now the trials and sorrows of life correspond with the weights which expand our faculties and enable us to gather home the treasures of the Covenant. Many are to-day in heaven who never would have been there but for the loss of some darling child, or the shock of some bitter disappointment, or the laceration of some piercing sorrow ; but love to Christ, like the floats, serves to keep the soul buoyant, tranquil, and cheerful.

Love to Christ is a principle which refines, beautifies, ennobles, nay, transfigures the soul. When love to Christ takes the throne of the heart, it is as if the bright cloud of the Divine glory¹ were descending to rest on the ark between the cherubim. Love to Christ will cover the character with a thousand qualities, like those beautiful daughters of the spring—the snowdrop, the crocus, the primrose

¹ 1 Pet. iv. 14.

the violet, the hyacinth, the lily, the celandine, the daffodil—which peer out from the soil when the winter is past. Love to Christ puts the jangling heart-strings in tune ; it imparts vigour and nimbleness to the limbs ; it makes a man invincible ; it renders him impervious to the arrows of death ; it gives him superiority to the ignominy, buffeting, and contempt of mankind ; it nerves him against the ridicule of the ignorant or of the learned, the scowl of the sceptic, the vicious, and the profane. It enables him to defy the fascinations and flatteries, the dissipations and horrible impurities of the world. It bestows on him power to climb mountains, to cross continents, to traverse deserts, to brave the hazards of the stormy ocean, to face the rigours of the arctic snows, to renounce the comforts of home, and to give up all for Christ. Before such a man all difficulties sink and disappear. Nothing is impossible for him. We ought to love Christ more than mother her child, husband his wife, or the betrothed his affianced. Blessed are they who are thrilled with this Divine enthusiasm of love to Christ ! Think of what the feeble disciples whom Christ left behind Him were able to accomplish under the commanding influence of love to Christ. They were few in number, without earthly weapon, without learning, without special genius, without rank in society, without money, without support from civil authorities, without friends in high places ; and yet,

did they not overturn the hierarchies of Judaism and Paganism, overcome the schools of heathen philosophy, overset the pillars of pride, covetousness, and vice throughout the empire, overthrow the temples of idolatry and superstition, and bear down the votaries of pleasure and dissipation, until, within two hundred and eighty years after Christ went to heaven, the whole Roman Empire, previously heathen and persecuting, declared itself Christian? All of this, too, was amid torrents of blood, none of which however was that of their enemies, but every drop their own. What was it that carried them onward to the accomplishment of marvels like these? It was simply this glowing, this enthusiastic love to Christ, who had loved them and died for them. What but this enthusiasm of love to Christ sustained the martyrs when called upon to shed their blood on the moors and mosses of Ayrshire, Wigton, Dumfries, and Lanarkshire? It is this love which is the requirement of all Christ's disciples at this hour. Were such an enthusiasm to take possession of those who profess to be Christ's people, the dark places of our city, and its sad streets, and all classes, rich as well as poor, would soon be visited, enlightened, purified, and cheered. Ay, more than this, the pining and perishing multitudes in heathen lands would be sought after and evangelized with an energy unmatched during all these eighteen centuries that since apostolic times

have sped away. It is this love for Christ which I long myself to possess. I see how love of man for woman, or of man for man, can sway society in every rank, how powerful is the love of mothers for their children, and I observe what merely human love can encounter, sacrifice, and achieve. Why cannot we, my fellow-Christians, have as glowing and commanding a love in our hearts for Christ?

But let it not be supposed that it is on our love to Christ that our salvation rests. Precious as that grace is, I feel thankful that not on our love is our hope for eternal life suspended. Our love to Christ is variable; it is never two days the same, and at times it threatens to disappear altogether. Not on our love to Christ, but on Christ's love to us, must our confidence be founded. That love, as revealed to us in His Cross, knows no change.

I have several times been in Spain. A dear friend there was watching over a young Spanish lad, who he fondly hoped was to prove a blessing to his countrymen. A dreadful malady—black small-pox—seized the boy and ultimately cut him off. The little fellow in his sickness became a mass of sores, his eyes were closed, and he was altogether a repulsive object. One day his faithful guardian said to him, as he lay blind on his bed, "Feliciano, I wish to ask you a question. If the Lord Jesus were beside you where I now stand, would you give Him a kiss?" "A kiss?" and then, recollecting himself

he said, "I would give Him ten thousand." A little while after, his friend said, "Feliciano, I wish to ask you another question. If the Lord Jesus were here where I stand, do you think He would give you a kiss?" The boy, though conscious of his own repulsiveness of condition, immediately replied, "He would give me a million."

This indeed was the language of a child under the weakness of disease, yet it suggests the thought that at the very moment when his own little heart declared that he glowed with love to Jesus he knew that his love to Christ was as nothing compared with Christ's love to him. The one love he measured by ten thousand; the other by ten hundred thousand!

It is not, as I have said, on our love to Christ, nor on anything of ours that we are to rest our confidence; not on our works, not on feelings or emotions and affections, even though these are prompted by the Holy Spirit, not even on our faith; for, though much is said of salvation through faith, it must be borne in mind that our faith itself is not our foundation. What is the foundation? It is Christ Himself, and no other. He is the foundation; not our works, our feelings, or faith, but Christ and His finished work,—a foundation broad and deep, and sure and strong,—a foundation immovable, unchangeable, indestructible and Divine—the Rock of Ages itself. On that rock take your stand. That

foundation is massive enough to bear the weight of yourself and of all your sins. If you had the sins of forty thousand sinners like yourself, it would be adequate to bear the weight of the whole. By faith rest on it, and the wonder will then be, not that you should be saved, but that you should be lost.

PART II.

II. *Faith in Christ the Unseen.*

“Jesus Christ: whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice.” Faith works by love, and might fitly take precedence of love in our discourse; but, as it stands second in the verse, we shall treat of this characteristic feature of Christ’s people now.

I cannot enter here on any disquisition as to the nature of this precious grace. Let it suffice to quote the description of faith given by another apostle: “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” What does that description imply? Is it not this, that faith, issuing like a messenger from the soul, stretches its wings towards objects which are distant and out of sight, and then, laying hold of these remote and invisible things, brings them home to the heart itself, and gives them place and influence there? Thus faith becomes practically the substance of things hoped for, the evidence or demonstration of things not seen.

Let me try to illustrate heaven-born faith by

earth-born faith. We may select for the purpose a remarkable instance of the latter, that of the eminent navigator who, in 1492, discovered America. This man of true genius, having become persuaded on grounds of reason that land must lie beyond the ocean towards the setting sun, endeavoured to obtain assistance from several royal potentates in furtherance of his project to reach it. At that time geographical science was in abeyance. He was regarded as a visionary. "Never, however," says his biographer, "did he speak with doubt or hesitation, but with as much certainty as if his eyes beheld the promised land." For eighteen years he laboured to carry out his design. The grandeur of his conceptions imparted to him a loftiness of character, so that in conferring with sovereigns in their cabinet his demeanour was like that of a king. And when at last, from the old convent of Er Rabida, on the coast of Spain (from whose windows I have myself gazed with intense interest on the Atlantic), he did set sail, in three small ships, called caravels, two of which had no deck, with what indomitable spirit did he proceed ! No lamentations of the timid relatives of his one hundred and nineteen companions, at his departure, no storms, no tempests, no variation of the needle, then for the first time observed, no monotony of interminable voyaging over the ocean wilderness, no misgivings and terrors of his comrades, no mutinies and conspiracies of the crews, could

shake his resolution or daunt his courage. Just when his followers had resolved to turn the ship's bows homeward, the land of his expectation burst on his eye.

Such was the earth-born faith of Christopher Columbus. Let us compare and contrast it with the heaven-born faith of Christ's people. The faith of the great admiral was the product of a vigorous intellect ; the grounds on which he had to act were the shrewd guesses and inferences of a penetrative understanding. But the faith of the Christian is implanted in him by the Spirit of God, and it finds its warrant in the irrefragable truth of the Divine Word. The bold Genoese set sail without chart or map. We, on the contrary, have a chart by which to steer—no other than the inspired Scriptures. The country for which we are bound is all mapped out for us. Every cape and headland, every bay, inlet, promontory, and isle of the land for which we steer has been traced out for us in the faultless projection of God's exceeding great and precious promises. The earth-born faith of the navigator swept at one bound over thousands of miles of ocean, and beheld the vegetation, the gorgeous scenery, the towering mountains, the riches and the mineral resources of the land unseen ; but the heaven-born faith of God's people, while yet they are on earth, shoots upward beyond the burning stars. It plants its foot on the plains of heaven ; it makes its way to the city which needs no sun, no moon ; it passes in by the gate of

pearl ; it paces along the street of shining gold ; it plucks the fruit of the tree of life ; it drinks of the pure river, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb ; it holds intercourse with an innumerable company of angels ; it exchanges salutation with the spirits of just men made perfect ; it beholds what eye hath not seen nor ear heard of what God hath prepared for them that love Him ; it obtains audience of God Himself and of the Lamb ; it gazes on the face of Jesus, and being recognised by Him it reverently makes its demand, and having in response received from the Lord Jesus as much of His fulness of grace and joy as it has capacity to carry away, faith stretches its pinions again, and as it had ascended, so now it descends, returning as a faithful messenger to the bosom from which it issued, to deposit in it the good things it has brought down, and to give them power and influence for the future there. In this manner faith becomes “the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.”

Let me pause again to ask whether you possess such a faith as this—a faith which takes you right up to Jesus, which appropriates Him, draws forth His fulness, and gathers it home ? This is the only kind of faith with which I personally can be satisfied. Many there are who seem to be contented with a faith which allows the soul and Christ to remain at all times far apart. But see how Jesus interpreted faith. He says, “Come to me.” This surely does

not mean holding aloof from Him, but, on the contrary, the closest possible approach.

Here, perhaps, I may remark that at conversion it is God's method to bestow two gifts. The first of these is a new and beautiful Bible. You ask, "Is it different from the one I possess?" If your inquiry refers to the number of chapters and words, I believe the two Bibles will be found to agree. "Is it then a new and more accurate translation?" "I cannot say it is." "Ah, then," you reply, "will not the good Bible I possess serve my turn?" "Nay," I answer, "the Bible I speak of is very different from yours. It cannot be purchased from the bookseller. It is printed, bound, and all made up in the New Jerusalem." What sort of Bible is this? It is a Bible that A MAN CAN UNDERSTAND! When in India, I received a gift of a Hindusthani New Testament, printed in Roman characters. I could read it therefore with ease, and my Indian servant caught its meaning when I read to him a few verses from the book, but for myself I did not understand a word of it. I could read the characters, but I did not know the language. There are not a few who can read God's Word, and even commit portions of it to memory, and yet are all the while entirely destitute of spiritual understanding of it. They never discover Christ to be "the treasure hid in the field," nor recognise either the beauty or the indispensableness of Christ. But in the day of converting power it is

otherwise. Then the eyes of the soul are enlightened, and the Bible becomes to its possessor a book full of life and light and glory. The second gift God bestows at conversion is that of a Servant. It is not befitting that the child of a Great King should be without some one to wait on him in this world ; accordingly, God provides all His children with an attendant. This servant is Faith. Faith is an invaluable servant, placed at the disposal of every converted man. But in order to its being of practical benefit, Faith must be kept in constant exercise. It is the exercise of Faith, and not merely the possession of it, that makes Faith's master rich. These Christians of Asia Minor not merely *had* believed, they were at that moment *believing*, and so were filled with joy. The servant must not be allowed to remain in inactivity, to doze and sleep in the sunshine. If he be left unemployed and in idleness, the servant will assuredly become weak, sickly, and unprofitable. Faith, therefore, must at all times be sent forth on its upward way. It must be kept ever on the wing. Should Faith ascend to heaven five hundred times a day to fetch down Christ's unsearchable riches, it will not be once too often.

With these precious gifts—the New Bible for their guide, and the swift-winged attendant Faith to wait on them—God's converted ones are blessed indeed.

PART III.

III. *Joy from Christ the Unseen.*

“In whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.” Love, Faith, Joy,—graces bound up with Christ the Unseen,—remind us of three charming roses blooming on one spray. Some persons there are who are suspicious of Christian joy. They feel oppressed by sin, and, being conscious of so much inward corruption, as well as of continual shortcoming, not to speak of the evil which they see all around them, they think it more becoming that life should be marked by sorrow than by joy. Now I allow that a sense of sinfulness should be ever present, even with the holiest. I remember Christ’s words, “Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted,” and that it is the “broken and contrite heart” which God will not despise. I should myself be distrustful of that joy which was not accompanied with brokenness of soul, and I know that a broken heart involves no little pain. Still this is no reason why joy should not be possessed and cultivated. Joy, like love and faith, is bought for the Church of God with Christ’s own blood. Jesus, on the eve of His agony, said, “These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full.” The fruit of the Spirit is joy. Heaven thrills with joy. The joy

we speak of to-day is full of glory—glorified joy, as the original language expresses it. I cannot but think that that which is full of glory, if it descend into the soul, must promote holiness of heart and conformity to Jesus. These strangers were in heaviness, and yet it would appear they at the very time were rejoicing with joy unspeakable and full of glory. True it is that this Divine joy is associated with “a broken heart.”

When attending the Great Centennial Exhibition in Philadelphia some years ago (1876), I was much interested by an object in the mechanical department. It was a huge machine for the crushing of sugar-cane. A large fly-wheel, with teeth around its axle, was revolving. This set a series of smaller wheels in motion, each turning round more slowly as it receded from the large wheel, but acquiring in proportion accumulated power. The last of these was connected with three ponderous metallic rollers, grooved on their surface, and not more than the eighth of an inch apart. These rollers were made to revolve slowly; and with what intent? That the canes should be subjected to their enormous pressure, should be bruised, crushed, and mangled, so that from the crushed stems there might exude the viscid saccharine liquid which, being collected and refined, should yield the pure, snow-white, crystalline, and delicious substance which sweetens life's cup in all our families. Now, as with the clarified sugar,

so with the glorified joy. That joy proceeds from God's "bruised reeds." Were it not that God's people are broken in their heart, we should have reason to stand in doubt as to the character of their joy. Christ is the well-spring of joy. Strange that the world should so readily associate the Gospel with moroseness. The Gospel is the religion of joy. It does not go about in dark clouds, reminding us of a funeral. Christ's followers walk with Him in white. "In Christ, believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory."

When Adam sinned in Eden, a fountain was opened there, which soon became a stream, and thereafter a great river—a river which has found its way into every region of the globe ; indeed, it passes every man's door at this day. The water of this river is dark and bitter, and of it every man on the surface of the earth must daily drink. What river is this ? It is the river of Sorrow. "In sorrow shalt thou eat bread all the days of thy life."

But while this is so, another fountain has been opened—not in Eden, but in Christ, the second and last Adam. This fountain has also become a stream, nay, a great river, and it comes through all the earth, though I cannot say that like the other it passes every man's door. Of this river none but the Christian drinks ; but of its water the Christian ought each day to drink. What is this river ? It is the river of Joy. Its waters are clear and

sparkle with light. "Joy unspeakable, and full of glory."

The Christian has two rivers flowing past him, one on either hand,—the river of Sorrow and the river of Joy. Of the one, the river of Sorrow, he must drink daily; of the other, the river of Joy, he ought to drink daily. He dwells, as did at one time his father Abraham, in Mesopotamia, *i.e.*, the country between the rivers. His Euphrates and Tigris are the rivers of Sorrow and Joy. Blessed be God, as with these rivers of the East, which at last unite to form one noble stream, that glides tranquilly to the sea, the rivers of Sorrow and Joy shall ultimately blend their waters, and the Christian shall find in his experience "that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose."

Surely I may with propriety ask whether you possess this joy? "The kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost." Has that kingdom been set up within you? I will not say that there are not things which are even more important in this world than joy, yet I think this is by no means an irrelevant inquiry. Does the religion you profess to have, yield you satisfaction? Has your conscience been tranquillized by the sprinkling of blood? Is the peace of God that passes all understanding yours? And do you know anything of

that quiet and deep blessedness which is found in connection with a good hope of eternal life and the holy indwelling of the Spirit of God ?

I feel assured, from what the Bible says of joy, that if you have it, it must promote holiness of life, foster patience under the trials of existence, and brighten on you the Divine image. Granting, however, that on your own account you could dispense in this world with joy, may not the value of joy be urged on you for the sake of others ? If it be that the Gospel is fitted to impart joy unspeakable and full of glory, is it not our duty to possess that joy, were it only to dispel from men's minds the idea they so mistakenly entertain, that Christianity is associated with gloom, sourness of temper, censoriousness, and grumbling ? Let us try to win people over to the side of the Gospel by letting them see, from what they witness in us, of how much happiness they are depriving themselves by their delay in coming to Christ, and by their standing aloof from the family of God. Do not wear a hard, bitter, and stony look, or go about with a countenance austere and frowning, so as to frighten children. Young men and maidens are scared by a long face and melancholy shaking of the head. Let us learn to welcome people to our prayer meetings with a smile, and remember that there are times when a happy face, borne by a district visitor, may do as much to cheer the inmates

of a dwelling as a four-paged tract. The joy of the Gospel, shining from the heart and from the countenance, amounts in many minds to an evidence of the truth of Christianity!

But what shall we say to those of you who are not Christians? We cannot bid you rejoice. We dare not offer you this joy—no, not one particle of it. You are still in your sins, enemies to God, nay, children of wrath, unforgiven and unsaved. How then can this joy be yours or be offered to you? The contrast between your condition and that of those Christians who may be sitting by your side is solemn indeed. It is sad to have to speak in this manner to you; but what else is there which in faithfulness is left for me to do? I cannot offer you joy, and yet, blessed be God, I have something entrusted to me to set before you for acceptance which is as good as joy, nay, which, I believe, will be admitted as being even more precious than joy. What is that which can be offered to a poor and condemned sinner which is better than joy? It is CHRIST—Christ Himself. There can be no doubt that the Lord Jesus Christ as a Saviour is put in your offer. He came into the world to save sinners. He laid down His life for the chief of sinners; and the chief of sinners He assures of a welcome, should he come to Him for salvation. Do not tarry. Your opportunity may be near its close.

In perhaps the most pathetic passage in the works

of a great British poet, an old king, whose mind had been unhinged by misfortune and the cruel treatment of his own flesh and blood, is introduced by the poet as bearing on his shoulders the lifeless form of his beloved and loving daughter, whose inestimable value he had been too long in recognising, and whom he had only been a few minutes too late to rescue and save from the hand of the murderer. Laying her down, he called for a looking-glass, saying that he had heard that if, when a glass was applied to the lips, the slightest dimness appeared on the surface, it was a sign that life was not extinct. But, when the mirror was brought, no dimness on the glass appeared, and then in the extremity of his anguish and distraction the old king, looking on the inanimate form before him, and clasping his hands, exclaimed :

"Thou'lt come no more,
Never, never, never, never, never!"

Oh! brethren, take care lest your priceless opportunity pass from you, and be recognised only when it is too late to benefit by the discovery, and you in indescribable bitterness, as you look on your fleeting opportunity gone from you irrevocably, have only to say of it in your anguish :

"Thou'lt come no more,
Never, never, never, never, never!"

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VII.

THE WISE MEN FROM THE EAST.

"When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy."—MATT. ii. 10.

IT is pleasant on a summer's eve to sit on a hill-slope overlooking the sea, on some spot near the entrance to our beautiful Frith, and to witness the noble steamer or the three-masted ship in full sail at the commencement of her voyage. Tranquilly the vessel glides over the calm waters, the rays of the setting sun gilding the sails and rigging. Soon the ship disappears behind the headland, and the shadows of night come down. The vessel reaches the ocean, and speedily finds herself amid moving mountains, whose tops are hoary with foam. The wild wind seizes her in its terrible grasp. The seas break over her bows and sweep her from stem to stern, her sails are split, her machinery or plating is strained, her top-masts and spars yield and snap, her cargo shifts, her crew is worn with toil, perhaps a man or two are carried overboard and seen no more. Yet the good ship thinks not of altering her course, far less of turning back. Like the bounding

steed, she mounts to the summit of the wave ; like the swift eagle, she sweeps down to the depths. Week after week she makes her way over the surging wilderness, till at last, it maybe on a sunny evening again, she anchors in the distant haven, and joyfully deposits her voyagers and cargo on the strand. Such a picture represents the life of one who sets out in sincerity for the better land. The man must lay his account with temptation, conflict, and disaster ; but under no circumstances must he desist or go back.

The visit of the Wise Men from the East illustrates the principle of faith in its trial and triumph ; and the narrative may prove helpful at the same time to those who are seeking the way to Zion, with their faces thitherward.

I. *The Awakening.*—Who were these sages ? They seem to have come from Persia,—we read of “wise men” in Esther i. 13,—and were doubtless the successors to the astrologers and wise men over whom Daniel, the Jewish prophet long before, had presided, during the captivity and afterwards. There is reason to believe that the remarkable prophecies of Daniel about the kingdom that was to be like a stone cut out without hands from the mountain, and which in the vision became a great mountain, and filled the whole earth, had given rise to expectations in the East, which were now in the providence of God to be realized. These students of

the skies received an extraordinary sign of Messiah's birth, in the sudden appearance of a new and brilliant star, unlike all with which they had been acquainted, and which may have shone in the sky for many nights in succession. How the sages were made to know that the blazing star corresponded with the birth of the Messiah, the Prince, the King of the Jews, is not told us. Balaam, in the East, long before Daniel, had spoken of a star that was to come out of Jacob ; but some intimation beyond this must have been given to them. A Divine warrant they undoubtedly had in the distant and dark regions of the East. Not less, but more distinct, is the warrant for our belief, contained in the Word of the Living God. The heavenly announcement, whatever it may have been, shook the sages out of their life's dream. It must be remembered that they were men of rank—not merely gentlemen, but nobles. They were wealthy, studious, and contemplative men, addicted to the science of those days. Their business was with parchments, mathematical compasses and squares, with horoscopes and planetary spheres, plans of the heavens, with calculations and occult research. The Eastern sages of those times were the honoured, trusted, and idolized among the people. All at once, these sages of our narrative were not only startled, but were seized with an idea that took powerful possession of them. What was it? It was not fame, nor gain, nor discovery, nor commerce,

nor science, nor politics, nor patriotism that roused them. It was the irrepressible desire to visit, and to do homage to, the young King whose birth had been signalized by the star, and they at once made up their minds to set out immediately in quest of him. I can conceive the shouts of ridicule with which their proposal would be received by their fellow-philosophers; the tittering and laughter that would prevail at court; the political surmises abroad as to their object in going to pay deference to the heir of a foreign throne, as well as the tears and lamentations of their wives and children over the perils they would be exposed to during a journey for months through the pathless waste. But these were not the only considerations that must have weighed with them. Habits of retirement had to be forborne; abstruse study sacrificed; calculations suspended; business neglected; vast expense incurred; serious risks to health undergone; and dangers from robbers encountered; in short, all the sweets of learned ease given up. But nothing could daunt them or even induce them to delay. They instantly made preparations; engaged camels and beasts of burden; got ready provisions; secured tents for sleeping in; purchased skins in which to carry water across the desert; hired servants to accompany them; and did not overlook the material for a present to the young monarch when they should reach him. I have myself passed through the Arabian desert,

and know what all this means. And now, we may suppose at early dawn the sages are seen in their travelling apparel assembled for departure. The camels kneel. The bedding and provisions are strapped on, amid the harsh cries of the quadrupeds. The servants vociferously get all things into order. The families of the sages come forward, in tears, to bid them farewell, the crowd of wondering spectators eagerly looking on. One last embrace of those dearest to them, some tender kisses to the children, and the travellers mount their beasts. The large creatures rise; the signal is given; and the *cafila*, or procession, moves away. One more wave of the hand, a slight cheer, a good-bye from the people left behind, and in a few moments the caravan disappears amid the mounts and depressions of the plain.

Does not the departure of these wise men remind us of that of Abraham from Ur of the Chaldees, beyond that very Euphrates? What these sages did is really what is required of us all. Every man who would be a Christian must make up his mind to forsake all, to brave shame and ridicule for Christ, to take up the cross and follow Jesus. Every one whose heart has really been touched by the Spirit of God will so do. Have you, like the merchant-man in the parable, been made willing to sell all that you possess for the Pearl of great price? God puts us to the test. He will have you decide for

Christ, confess Him openly, leave all behind, and go. The great attempt of church-going people in our time is to keep hold of both worlds—to follow religion, as Bunyan has it, so long as she lets us walk in silken slippers.

Make up your mind to break off from the world's allurements; make a decided stand. To hesitate is to yield. Declare at once and openly for Christ. Let me give you these five counsels for the “narrow way.”

1. Renounce all things that you may win Christ.
2. Bear the loss of all things for the sake of Christ.
3. Do without all things if you have Christ.
4. Count that you have all things if you possess Christ.
5. Submit at all times to the will of Christ. Follow Jesus only; follow Jesus fully; follow Jesus alway.

II. *The Cities of Israel.*—The journey of the sages must have lasted at least two months. Ezra and his company took four to go over the ground. The nights are beautifully clear in the desert; and, when the tents were pitched, the sages would scan the heavens. The constellations of the northern hemisphere would shine forth with peculiar splendour—the Pleiades with their “sweet influences,” majestic Orion with his “bands,” Mazzaroth, the signs of the zodiac each in its season, and ruddy “Arcturus with his sons.”

But however earnestly they searched the sky, no trace could they ever find of the star that had so powerfully moved them with its brightness. God gives us as much light as is necessary for our guidance, and we must be content if He does not grant us more. They, no doubt, enjoyed delightful converse with each other as they journeyed on; anticipating in all probability the splendour of the court where so great a King had been born, and in whose advent even distant nations like their own had such deep concern.

One thing they would take for granted—that the land to which they repaired would be filled with rejoicing, that in every town they would gather tidings of the young darling of the nation. It had not been told them in what city exactly the young Prince was to be found; but what of that? They would learn where he was immediately on their entering the land. Let us imagine their approach to the first city on the frontier that lay in their path, their enthusiasm after their long journey being wound up to the highest pitch. They enter the town quivering with excitement. They look on the citizens with interest, and, reaching the travellers' camping-ground, the camels kneel, and the strangers descend, respectfully requesting the authorities to come to them. They inquire where the young child is that has been born King of the Jews. But instead of intelligence in the faces of the people,

they are met with a look of blank astonishment. A young prince! Why, Herod was an old man. They had never heard of any birth in the royal house. "But it must be so," the sages would reply, "for we have seen his star in the East, and are come to worship him." The people would scarcely make out what they meant, and no doubt regarded the strangers as the dupes and victims of a monstrous deception.

I can picture to myself with what bewilderment the wise men must have looked on each other. The thought of the ridicule that would meet them at home, all the consequences of their idle journey, would rush on their mind. "How should we foreigners," they would say, "be better informed about the King of the Jews than these Jews themselves?" It will be a marvel indeed if they do not remount their camels, and bid their servants and retinue prepare to return homeward.

The trials of these sages had now in right earnest begun. The ship that had weighed anchor so prosperously at first was now caught in the hurricane. If you set out in quest of Christ and of the kingdom of God, you must lay your account to meeting formidable hardships and difficulties. Let me sketch a specimen of the trials to which an inquirer is not uncommonly exposed.

Suppose a young man who has been living in thoughtless indifference about the state of his soul

to be suddenly roused to concern about his sins ; a piercing sense of guilt and danger has overtaken him. Some serious illness or some powerful sermon has alarmed his conscience, or the Bible or some good book has roused him to anxiety. He looks around for relief. He is wishful to obtain counsel from those he thinks have had more advantages than himself, such as the older, the more talented, the better informed. What is the youth's astonishment to find that the mass of mankind around him are utterly insensible to the things that have so profoundly moved him. The men of repute and intelligence, the men of business, the acute and clear-witted, and those of moral habit too, seem wholly uninterested as to how conscience is to be set at rest, and how a poor sinner is to get to heaven ; he discovers that while men can be keen on every other subject, on the matter of the soul's salvation there is a universal apathy. He sees men seeking the acquisition of wealth and the gratification of their pleasures, as if eternal things had no existence. Above all, he is staggered by the vapourings of men of science, hostile to religion. Nay, old people, who know that they are not far from the grave, appear as wedded to earthly things as any others. "Can there be truth in the Bible?" he is tempted to say "in Jesus Christ, in heaven or hell, in the necessity for repentance and of turning to God, when the whole world, at least that with which I come in

contact, is living in total indifference to these things? Why should I deny myself so many gratifications, when multitudes are rushing in to enjoy them? Christianity must indeed be terribly true if it be true at all." His temptation is like that of the wise men. Ah! we must not be staggered by the example or opinion of others. The Word of God and the authority of God with us must be paramount. "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." Do not wait till others repent and believe and confess Christ, nor desist from seeking Jesus because wherever you go you meet with coldness and negligence. The wife must not wait for the husband, nor the children for the parent. There is not a moment to lose; the hour of exhausted opportunity may be about to strike. Away! Flee for your life!

III. *Jerusalem*.—The wise men were not dispirited. They remounted their camels and went on. "These people are ignorant," they would say. "We must go to the proper quarter for information. We shall learn all at the capital. There King Herod has his court; there are to be found the wise men of the kingdom, the priests, the nation's teachers, and its warriors. Let us speed onward to Jerusalem." Their entrance, probably by what is now called the Damascus gate, must have been impressive. The line of camels, the novel garb of

the sages, their high Persian caps, their well-dressed beards, probably the insignia of their order borne before them, the appearance of their attendants and baggage, must have awakened curiosity. The shepherds at Christ's birth entered Bethlehem at night; but these strangers from the distant East passed into Jerusalem in broad daylight. A prodigious sensation was, ere long, produced. Who are they? Whence do they come? What has brought them here? were questions which were asked on every side. But what rang through the city, like the shrill blast of a clarion, was the bold demand and announcement, which, notwithstanding all previous disappointments, they openly made. "Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him." If the astonishment of the sages at the ignorance and apathy of the people in the cities through which they had passed had been great, what must have been their amazement now? In Jerusalem *they could not find one* to give them any tidings. Though reports of the visit of the shepherds to Bethlehem a good while before may have reached the city, and the words of Simeon and Anna may have been recounted, all had been zealously repressed—at least the sages could gather no information whatever. Who can estimate the magnitude of the stumbling-block thus placed in the way of the strangers? Here they were come

from a vast distance and from a foreign land to do homage to the young King whose birth they believed to have been signalled to them from heaven by a star; and yet in the chief city, where the reigning king had his palace, they could not meet with a single individual who could tell them anything on the subject.

The trial to which the wise men were exposed in Jerusalem is not altogether without parallel among inquirers after salvation to-day. Let me suppose the awakened sinner before described—the young man who has been brought under concern about his soul—to have resisted the temptation to go back to the world by the prevailing indifference he found in the masses around him. He will probably buoy himself up with the idea that he has gone to the wrong quarter for counsel. He will say, "I must repair to Jerusalem, to those who are professedly the people of God, to those who have the name of Christ and wish to be recognised as His followers." He hastens therefore to those who have sat at the Lord's Table, and who have there solemnly declared their allegiance to Christ. Alas! what is too often the unhappy experience of that young man? Is it not that those professors to whom he approaches seem utterly destitute of the savour of the Gospel? He finds that he can spend whole days in the society of these people without their giving any sign that they are under the power of religion; that no one goes from their door a whit the wiser as to the way

in which a poor sinner can be saved. When, some time ago, I was in a large city (Dublin), a gentleman rose at a public meeting, and mentioned the case of a poor ignorant woman, who went into no fewer than thirty-two families where she thought she might find the Truth, in hope of learning the way of peace, but without success, till afterwards she met with a minister who put her on the right path. The man is perplexed by discovering that there is a strange ignorance of the saving truths of the Gospel betrayed by the persons he visits, and that the religious profession may sometimes be even obtrusively made, while the aims and spirit of the parties are evidently all worldly; that a sordid earthliness characterizes their homes; that family worship is either performed as a mere formality or is omitted altogether; that they can strike as hard a bargain, be as exacting from those in financial difficulties, be as keen to make money, be as unscrupulous in exaggerating or lessening facts, as ready to take advantage of the weakness or simplicity of their neighbours, as other people; that they even resort to very questionable methods; that they can be overtaken by unjustifiable bankruptcy, and recklessly involve in ruin the families of others, even of the widow and the fatherless; that they can be as passionate, proud, harsh, and cruel as the ordinary men of the world; and that as to ability to help any poor and anxious soul out of spiritual difficulties

they are utterly incompetent. The influence of these “Jerusalem” people is perhaps the most pernicious with which we are acquainted. In fact, they prove like a moral malaria, which renders proximity to them dangerous and fatal. These people lay down stumbling-blocks wherever they go, and multitudes of inquirers fall on them and are broken.

IV. *The Star.*—The appearance and strange inquiry of the Persian sages shook Jerusalem like an earthquake. Ah! by similar means God can rouse up a careless world. He can startle a slumbering church, too, in a moment, as by the midnight cry in the parable. The palace itself was moved. The crafty and murderous old king listened to the rumours and was disquieted. There was a general expectation abroad among the Jews at the time that some great deliverer was about to arise. The arrivals of strangers from afar and their outspoken utterances filled Herod with alarm. The citizens, knowing Herod would scruple at no deed of blood which jealousy and displeasure might suggest, instead of welcoming the tidings brought them, were filled with forebodings of evil for themselves. Alas! how soon did it appear that Christ was to find Himself unwelcomed among men! Herod, unable to solve the difficulty presented, and fearing there might be some danger to his throne, took an astute method of satisfying himself. He summoned a large conclave, indeed of all the chief priests and scribes

of the people, and having got them together he craftily addressed them.

“Right reverend and right honourable, I have invited you to assemble, because I have a question to propose to you, one which I doubt not you will be able to answer to me. In your venerable books of Moses and the Prophets, is there any place which tells us where the Great Messiah, the long-expected Deliverer, is to be born ? ” These wise counsellors of Herod, who would have been as unwilling to acknowledge Jesus as Herod himself, at once replied, “Oh yes, please your Majesty, one of our prophets has distinctly told us,” and they at once turned to the prophecy of Micah in the parchments—“that it is to be in Bethlehem Ephratah that He is to be born, a town about eight miles from Jerusalem.” “Thank you, gentlemen,” said the king, and forthwith dismissed them. Immediately he sent for the Persian sages, bringing them with utmost secrecy to the palace. On their arrival, doubtless, they would prostrate themselves in Oriental method before the old king. “I understand you have seen a remarkable star, which heralds the advent of a great Prince. Tell me, pray, at what exact time did the star appear ? ” The sages give a general reply ; but the cunning king, who had his own ends to serve, was not satisfied till the precise date of the appearance of the luminary was given him. All this was in order that he might know the age of the children

whom it was his purpose to slay, with intent to kill this youthful rival to his throne. "Now, noble Persians," he would go on to say, "I am happy to be able to inform you where the young Prince you seek is to be found." I think I see a smile of gladness on the faces of the sages. "It is not far from here, a city called Bethlehem. Now my wish and command is that you go away immediately to Bethlehem, and make search. There must be something mysterious about the Prince you seek, or I would have seen him ere this; but do you find out where the young child is, and come back to me instantly, and you and I will go and do homage to him together." The king, who did not wish anything to be known, lest his bloody purpose should be balked, seems to have retained the sages till nightfall. They must have sent for the baggage, camels, and attendants, and then have been despatched by the king on this, perhaps to them, the strangest part of their journey.

It was at this point that the trial of the wise men reached its crisis. What! to be sent away to Bethlehem all alone, without a convoy, without a courtier, nobleman, or escort, without a servant to attend them or to show the way! Why did not Herod bid them wait till next day and then go with them himself? or why did the king not send a royal messenger to make inquiry for them ere they proceeded further? To be dismissed, ordered to

leave the city by night, must have seemed to them inexplicable. They had no idea of the bloody design of the king; that absolute secrecy was indispensable, lest his fell purpose should be baffled; but in ignorance of this, their dismissal without any escort must have proved staggering in the last degree.

Many there are, like Herod, who can point the way to where Christ may be found, who never go themselves. But let me say to inquirers after Christ, do not desist in consequence of isolation and discouragement. These sages had to set out alone in the darkness, and this after a succession of trials enough to have quenched hope. God oftentimes lets His people experience the sore anguish of solitariness. They are left without a friend. The whole world seems to turn against them, or at least to forsake them, and leave them desolate. Have you felt, my poor brother or sister, thus to be alone? Be not cast down; others have felt like you—most people do at some time or another. The deepest sorrow may precede the moment of light, liberty, and joy. Let not your faith yield, or your heart give way to despondency. Be like these sages, who in this have set us an example for all time. Your faith must indeed stand, not on the authority nor in the multitude of men, but in the Word. Noah was in the right, though all the world laughed at him and his ark.

The sages were pursuing their wondrous way,

when one of them happened to look upwards, and beheld a lustrous star shining overhead, seemingly at no great distance from the earth. "See! see!" we hear him say, and immediately the eyes of the others are raised. "What! can it be so? Yes, it is the same. It is the very star, the same star that we saw in the East, oh, so long ago! Ah, we are right after all, though our countrymen ridiculed us, though the cities of Israel could tell us nothing! Though Jerusalem could give us no help, though Herod the king has sent us out to travel alone, yet do we see that, strangers from the East and from among the nations as we are, God loves us, and has showed us mercy. He set us in the way at first; He has watched our steps all the journey; He is smiling on us from heaven now. Yonder light is dearer to us than any other in the sky."

And "when they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy."

The language indicates the instantaneous rebound from a state of deep depression to one of jubilant gladness, such as the Christian knows when, believing in Christ unseen, he rejoices "with joy unspeakable and full of glory."

God is considerate and kind. He tries us up to what our faith is able to bear, but not a hair-breadth beyond it. God did not miraculously guide them through the wilderness, nor tell them where the young child was. It was their part to find this out.

The search proved the reality of their faith ; it called general attention to the Saviour's birth ; and has left us an example nobler than any monument of marble, unmutilated and undefaced through all time. After all their temptations, at the fitting moment, the star appeared. It will be so, Christian, in your case also. When Zion is saying, "The LORD hath forsaken me, my Lord hath forgotten me," God speaks lovingly in her ear, saying, "I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands ; thy walls are continually before me."

V. *The Finding of Jesus.*—The sight of the star would reawaken ideas of the grandeur of the young King. The sages would imagine Him to be lodged in some magnificent abode. *The star led them on.* It went before them, as if it had been a brilliant lamp held aloft in the darkness and borne along by some invisible hand. What was this star ? It was not a fixed star, for it moved. It was not a planet, for though planets move in their orbits they are so distant as to appear motionless. It was not a meteor or a comet, for meteors shoot across the firmament and are soon extinguished ; while this star went so slowly, glowed so steadily, and was so near as to mark out the individual house where the young child was. Doubtless the star was no other than the Shekinah,—the token of the Divine glory, which appeared as a flaming sword at the gate of Paradise, as a pillar of cloud and of fire to guide Israel

in the wilderness, the glory afterwards between the Cherubim, the glory of the Lord that shone around the shepherds of Bethlehem on the night of the Saviour's birth. This bright glory took now the form of a blazing star. The travellers passed through the gate of Bethlehem. At length the star rested above one of the inferior dwellings of the town. “Can this be the palace of the great King?” they would say. I see with my mind's eye the procession halting at the door. The camels kneel. The sages dismount. They knock. They enter. No guardsman nor courtier nor attendant gives them admission or conducts them inward. All in the narrative that is mentioned as meeting the eye was a woman with a little child. But this was enough for them. The star was outside overhead, arrested in its course. There could be no doubt that this was *He*. So it came to pass that, on the plain mud floor, these sages all fell down and bowed before—not the mother—but the little child. They fell down and worshipped him and none besides. Then, hastening outside, they took down and fetched in their packages, and, unconsciously fulfilling prophecy, they brought out their gold and frankincense and myrrh, and offered them to the young King. This trial of doing homage to the child was perhaps as great as any they had experienced. But the faith which had been so signally put to proof remained steadfast now and to the last.

This homage shown to the babe, clothed in the mean raiment which the house of the carpenter supplied, and surrounded by tokens of humiliation, corresponds in our case with a cordial reception of salvation on our part of a crucified Christ. It is not a Christ after the flesh in whom we trust, nor are we to acknowledge Him merely as now exalted and glorified. We must place our reliance on Him as the Lamb that was slain, and as the one great substitute who bore our sins in His own body, and hung dead for us on the accursed tree. Though He is eternally blessed of the Father, He saves us by being made a curse for us. It is not by His being lifted up to heaven, but by His being lifted up on the cross, that He draws all men to Him. Have you yet done homage to Him as the crucified One? Are you content to be saved by His blood and by His cross alone? See that you mistake not the true foundation for hope and mercy, and as with the receiving of Christ, so, be not deceived with regard to the practice of Christianity. The Master Himself has told us, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me."

The wonderful faith of these Gentiles illustrates the glorious sovereignty of Divine grace. What but the grace of God awakened these sages from their idolatrous sun-worship, made them willing to leave all and set out on their pilgrimage, sustained them through those extraordinary trials and dis-

couragements which befell them as they entered the land of Israel, enabled them without hesitation to acknowledge as the Saviour of Jew and Gentile that poor little Child in His mother's arms, and made them become a new missionary power to arouse mankind then and in all succeeding ages? Unquestionably it was the grace of God which effected all this. By grace, indeed, ye are saved. God can raise up witnesses for Himself where they are least expected. The naturalist assures us that absolutely the most beautiful species of all the nine thousand kinds of birds known to adorn the globe, a creature whose plumage is of surpassing variety of tint and brilliancy, whose feathers and form and flight give the most perfect idea of gracefulness to the eye, rejoicing in the name of the royal bird of paradise, is yet only found in the remotest and wildest regions of the earth, or rather isles of the ocean,—amid the dense thickets of New Guinea, for example,—and among savage tribes least of all capable of appreciating its loveliness.

So is it the good pleasure of God to rear up from the most unpromising situations—in alleys and lanes of the city, in colliers' huts, as well as in royal palaces—those who surpass others in faith, courage, holiness, charity, and usefulness. The grace which made these wise men to be what they were is able to do as much for you.

We may suppose that the wise men would not

unduly prolong their stay, especially as it was at night that their visit was paid. They would remove their packages outside and retire. As they went away they would ask permission, doubtless, to return and to see the young child on the morrow. As they passed towards the door, they would say to each other, "We shall come again to-morrow. To-morrow; yes, to-morrow. We shall return to-morrow!" Ah! that "to-morrow" never came to them. They do not seem ever to have seen the young child again. For that very night they were warned of God in a dream; it is not said, by an angel,—they knew nothing about angels. The voice said, "Up, and away. You must not go back to Herod, who is anxiously awaiting your immediate return. Depart at once to your own country." So, rising early, loading and mounting their camels, they departed to their own country by another way. The end for which their long, expensive, and toilsome journey had been undertaken was accomplished, it would appear, in the sight afforded them during the brief hour of a single night. One glimpse of Jesus was recompense sufficient for all their toil, their outlay, their perils, their trials.

Dear brethren, one sight of Christ obtained by you to-day would avail to change the current of your life for all the future. It is my hope that some of you may get such a glimpse under one sermon. It does not take long to recognise and to receive the

Lord Jesus, and to as many as receive Him to them He, at the very time, gives power to become the sons of God.

We hear of these noble Persians no more. Who they were ; what were their names ; what they became, and what they did when they returned to their own country, we cannot tell. But if we ask where are they now, the answer is, gathered away to the kingdom above, mingling with that mighty throng who have been redeemed by the blood of the Lamb. They have left their wonderful history behind them, as an imperishable legacy to the world. Doubtless, the Lord who led them, has made, and will still make, the record of their pilgrimage a means of bringing many strangers to heaven. Blessed wise men ! Truly and gloriously wise, we shall meet you again ! Yes, such of us as belong to Christ shall see them shining in their royal mantles on the resurrection morn. Will not their crowns of gold seem beautiful as they cast them before the Lamb on the sapphire pavement of heaven ? But, whatever may be said of them, these golden crowns cast down before the throne will not be an offering more precious, more lovely, and more acceptable than the myrrh, the frankincense, and the gold which, borne by the camels over the dreary and thirsty waste, were spread out before the Lowly Child on the mud floor of the cottage in Bethlehem. Amen.

VIII.

MIGHTY TO SAVE.

“Who is this that cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah? this that is glorious in his apparel, travelling in the greatness of his strength? *I that speak in righteousness, mighty to save.*”—ISA. lxiii. 1.

THESE words occur in one of the most alarming portions of Scripture. Christ is in vision represented as coming into view when engaged in the destruction of the enemies of God and of His people. The prophet beholds Him as He approaches, attired in magnificent apparel, but which is strangely marked with red spots. The Traveller is not at first recognised. Who is this? is the question that is anxiously proposed. To this the majestic Stranger replies as He draws near, “*I that speak in righteousness, mighty to save.*” When it is asked why His raiment is dyed red, like the garments of one who has trodden grapes in the wine-vat, the Lord replies that He has trodden the wine-press alone, that His enemies were like clusters of grapes under His feet, that the juices of the trodden clusters had besprinkled His garments,

and that He had trampled the transgressors in His anger, for the day of vengeance was in His heart and the year of His redeemed was come. What may serve to make this more impressive to us is the fact that in the awful imagery of the Book of the Revelation it is to this passage that the Spirit of God more than once refers, in illustration of the vengeance of the Lord on His impenitent adversaries. It is in the midst of this alarming disclosure of Divine judgment that the striking description given in our text takes place. We should have expected Him to say, “I am he that speaks in righteousness, mighty to destroy.” Instead of this, though no doubt with an eye mainly on Israel, He says, “I that speak in righteousness, *mighty to save.*”

PART I.

Our Need of a Great Deliverer.—The first thing which the words suggest is the greatness of the peril from which deliverance is required. Why should the Lord announce Himself to be “mighty to save” were it not that we need a *great* Saviour? “I have laid help,” says God the Father, “on one that is mighty.” To show the propriety of the inference we have drawn, let me suppose a labourer engaged on a steep railway cutting to have lost his footing, and rolled down the slope into a muddy stream of no great depth.

He gathers himself up, and is making his way to the opposite bank, when a fellow-workman at some distance, seeing the plight of his companion, hurries to the spot, and shouts at the pitch of his voice, "Courage, my friend! I am at hand to help you. I am strong to deliver." The man in the stream might well reply, "Thanks for your good intentions, but I think I can manage to scramble out without assistance." In this case we all can perceive that the language from the friendly neighbour would be out of place, indeed extravagant. But now, take another instance. Suppose that in the Northern Pacific a ship were anchored in a bay, and that while undergoing the requisite overhaul before proceeding on her voyage, one of the crew were to lose his hold and fall overboard. While struggling to keep afloat on the heaving sea, one of those monsters of the deep, such as I myself witnessed in Moreton Bay, Queensland, rises to the surface,—a huge tiger shark, its back fin appearing above water, with its large head, round glaring eyes, and ferocious teeth, and with its hideous form marked all over with dark stripes. It comes swingling along, leisurely approaching the struggling seaman, with intent to devour him. Then one of his shipmates, observing the critical condition of the young man, grasps a large knife lying on the deck, and, stepping on the bulwark, leaps down into the sea. He swims towards the other, now paralyzed with terror, and, knife in hand,

cries aloud, "Cheer up! don't be afraid! I know how to deal with these monsters. I am strong to save you," and so he interposes himself between the shark and its human prey. We can all understand that there would be as much propriety in the language in this case as there would be impropriety in the other.

Now, when Christ announces Himself to be mighty to save, we may be assured that there must be some formidable danger from which no one but Himself is competent to deliver us.

What is this monster that we have to dread, and which threatens to swallow us up? It is SIN. Sin is a monster more terrible, yet more stealthy, than all beside. Sin is the strongest of all earthly things. Except the grace of God, there is nothing known that is stronger than sin. Sin is stronger than Satan. Satan is not the master of sin; sin is the master of Satan; Satan is the slave of sin. Satan is called the "old serpent which deceiveth the whole world;" but the old serpent is himself held in the coils of another serpent stronger than he, and who has bound him in his terrible folds for unknown ages. Are not these the "chains" in which the spirits that fell are bound, "under darkness unto the judgment of the great day"? Sin darkens, defiles, degrades, deceives, deadens, desolates, destroys. How shall I speak of sin?

Sin gnaws the vitals.

It stings like an adder.

It makes us bleed.

Sin drives us before it.

It pursues us through the streets.

It tracks us over the world.

Sin is a detective from which there is no escape.

It drags us to the judgment-seat.

It is a witness to testify against us.

Sin chains us to an iron bar, like the galley-slave.

It is a scourge to torment us.

It is an avenger to punish us.

Sin darkens the understanding.

It hardens the heart.

It depraves the affections.

It enslaves the will.

Sin covers the walls of memory with dismal pictures.

It crowds the imagination with revolting shapes.

It converts conscience now into a sepulchre, now into a
dungeon of despair.

Sin fills us with disquietude and alarm.

It tortures with remorse.

It poisons our enjoyment of everything.

It makes life insupportable.

Sin burdens us with a secret that weighs us to the earth.

It puts a skeleton in the closet.

It mocks us at our feasts.

It haunts us in our solitude.

It is the terror of the death-bed.

Sin inveigles us with its glozing flatteries.

It enchants us with its angelic smile.

It lurks like the vampire to suck our blood.

Sin distends the bosom with pride and passion.

It pollutes us with the leprosy of covetousness and lust.

It envenoms us with jealousy, rancour, and revenge.

Sin enervates the mental faculties.

It paralyzes our usefulness.

Once yielded to, it produces an ineffaceable stain.

In a moment it fastens down chains of iron on the life.

Sin, in one thoughtless hour, blights for ever the happy home.

It withers up the blossoms of innocence.

It shuts the soul off for years from access to God.

It scandalizes our country and Christianity itself.

Sin sows the wind, it reaps the whirlwind.

It assumes as many forms in the soul, as does disease in the body.

It corrupts society around, and transmits its virus to posterity.

Centuries after a man is dead, it will rise up as a baneful miasma from his grave to contaminate and destroy.

Sin overwhelms us with self-reproach.

It stifles us with shame.

It makes a coward of the boldest.

It ever compels us to commit more sin.

Culture cannot subdue it.

Prosperity cannot dispossess it.

Adversity cannot eradicate it.

Good deeds cannot cover it.

Salt tears cannot obliterate it.

Repentance cannot atone for it.

Rites and ceremonies cannot smother it.

Pious gifts before or after death cannot bury it.

Remorseful prayers in sackcloth cannot charm it away.

Sin maddens men to frenzy.

It goads them to suicide.

It lures to infanticide, conspiracy, and murder.

Sin brings us under condemnation.

It separates us from God.

The wages of sin is death.

Time cannot alter it.
Habit cannot palliate it.
Temptation cannot excuse it.

The darkness cannot shroud it.
The deep cannot keep it.
The grave cannot hide it.

Sin is the universal plague of the human race.
It is the pestilence that sweeps the millions of mankind from
the earth.
The tenacity with which it clings to the Christian in this
world is an ever-deepening mystery.
Sin, hereafter, is the worm that never dies.

What have you done with your sins? Have they been put away? Have they been forgiven? Has the reigning power of sin within you been broken? Have you yet been made partaker of a new life? If your sin has not been pardoned, when do you expect it to be so? Are you waiting for your death-bed? Are you reckoning on being forgiven then? You know that you have sinned; not the word of God alone, but your own conscience witnesses against you. Conscience! What was it that drove Cain from the presence of the Lord? It was Conscience! What made the brethren of Joseph tremble as they stood before him, unaware that he knew them? It was Conscience! What was it that smote David when his grievous sin was set before him by the prophet? It was Conscience! What made Ahab stagger in Naboth's vineyard, and say to the yet silent Elijah, "Hast thou found me, O

mine enemy?" It was Conscience! What made Belshazzar's knees knock against each other, and caused him to tremble all over, when the noiseless finger traced on the wall characters he did not understand and could not even read? It was Conscience! What sent Peter out of Caiaphas' hall in an agony of tears, when he had denied his Lord? It was Conscience! What drove Judas to his doom? It was Conscience!

A great poet, in one of his powerful productions, sets before us a guilty queen whose hands had been stained with blood. Acting under the impulses of conscience, she is represented as coming forth from her room in her nightdress, at dead of night, with lighted taper in her hand. Her eyes are wide open, but their sense is shut. She is walking in her sleep. Setting the taper down, unconscious that she is watched in all her movements, she steps forward, and, silently for a time, rubs her hands, as if washing them. Hark! she speaks. Hush! and we may hear her words.

"Yet here's a spot!

What, will these hands ne'er be clean?

Here's the smell of the blood still:

All the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand.

Oh! oh! oh!"

What a matchless exhibition of conscience is this! we exclaim as we read. Why do we say so? Not so much because a graphic picture is before us, as

that a mirror is held up in which we see reflected the action of our own conscience. What is it that can remove the stain of blood? Not clean water; no, nor bitter tears. Is there anything that can efface the stain of blood? Yes. What is it? It is blood. What blood? That of the man whose blood has been shed? No. That of the man who has shed the blood? No. That of some loving friend who has consented to give his life for the murderer? No. What blood then? The blood of the Lord Jesus Christ alone, who died for us. Has that blood been applied yet to you? I do not believe that any one here has embrued his hands in his brother's blood; but remember, that though you have not the blood of another resting on your head, all sin has a stain that can only be removed by the blood of Christ. Oh! may each one here be able to say, "Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, . . . to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever."

PART II.

The Deliverer.—Who is the Deliverer? The one Deliverer is the Lord Jesus Christ. He is mighty to save. Do you remember Samson, the strongest of men? He stood alone against a whole nation, and made it quail. In his wondrous deeds he had no predecessor, no coadjutor, no successor. He made use of no weapon of war; yet he slew his

thousands. In some respects Christ resembled Samson. In all His undertakings Christ was alone. He had no predecessor, no coadjutor, no successor. He made use of no earthly weapon. When He stood up, it was to subdue, not a nation, but a world. Yet what a contrast is there between them ! Samson was raised up to destroy men ; Christ was sent to destroy sin. Samson conquered by super-human force ; Christ conquered by still more mysterious weakness. Samson went forth to slay his enemies ; Christ came to save His enemies. Samson died *with* his enemies ; Christ died *for* His enemies.

Let us see how Christ saves us from our sins. He came to put away sin. This was the very end for which He appeared in this world. It was not merely to reveal new truths, or to show sympathy with us in our sorrows, or to set us a perfect example. A perfect example would only have aggravated our guiltiness, for not one man or woman would have been found able to follow it. He came to deliver us from sin. How did He accomplish this ? Not by a violent expulsion of sins from the earth, and by driving them off by His great strength ; but by taking them up, and gathering the sins upon Himself. When He appeared, His presence was the signal for the iniquities of men to come to Him. Is it not written, “He bare our sins” ? “All we, like sheep,” says the prophet, “have gone astray ; we have turned every one to

his own way ; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all." You remember the plagues of Egypt. One of those was the plague of locusts. God bade Moses stretch forth his rod, and the Lord brought a swarm of locusts 'on the land. Never were such clouds of locusts before or since. They darkened the sky, hiding the light of the sun. Then, descending in millions, they covered the face of the whole land, so that not an inch of ground could be seen, and they ate up every blade of grass and every herb of the field. That swarm of locusts—"Warping," as Milton says, "on the eastern wind"—symbolizes to me what happened when Christ appeared on earth. Our iniquities in swarms, like those Egyptians' millions of filthy locusts, came rushing from the four winds, gathered about Him, and settled down on Christ's soul. He was Himself purer far than the snow on the summit of the loftiest mountains, more spotless than the light, holy as God is holy ; yet He bare the sins of many ; nay, He is said to have been "made sin for us." No wonder that we see Him bowed down in Gethsemane under the mighty load. Ah ! do we not hear Him say in that Psalm which refers to Him, "Mine iniquities have taken hold upon me, so that I am not able to look up ; they are more than the hairs of mine head : therefore my heart faileth me" ?¹ These iniquities were not His own ; they were ours. Who but one

¹ Psalm xl. 12.

that was Divine could have borne a load like this? But this is not all. When Christ took on Him this mighty burden, how did He get rid of it? We remember how Samson, rising at midnight, took up the doors of the gate of a city, and, carrying them on his shoulders to the top of a hill, threw them down and left them there. Was it thus that Christ got rid of His terrible burden? Ah! no. The only way in which Christ could put away His load of sin was by enduring the punishment that was due to the sins. Accordingly it is written, not merely that He was made "sin for us," but that He was "made a curse for us." The eternally beloved Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, consented to be made a curse for us. He "his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree." What tree? It was the tree of execution, the tree of punishment. It is by His becoming a substitute for us, by taking the sinner's responsibilities on Him, and pouring out His soul unto death for us, that He is our Saviour.

To bring this idea before the mind's eye, let me make use of an illustration from Scripture. I allude to the story of Barabbas.

Pilate, the Roman governor, was, on the morning of the day of Christ's crucifixion, most anxious to secure the escape of Jesus. He was thoroughly convinced of Christ's innocence, and shrank from having his hands and his office soiled by the unjust condemnation of the mysterious prisoner. He there-

fore laboured to set Jesus free. It was a custom at the time of the Jewish Passover for the governor to pardon some criminal, and the people happened to remind Pilate of this. Pilate grasped at the idea of offering Jesus as the criminal to be set at liberty. A very unjust course, though proposed with kind intention. The people would not consent to this arrangement; another course was therefore adopted. Pilate offered to give the people their choice for release of one of two whom he should nominate. In order to make the liberation of Jesus more sure, Pilate resolved to place Him before the people alongside of the greatest scoundrel he could find at the time, so as to compel the people to demand Jesus rather than the dangerous villain. Accordingly he sought out the very worst criminal the jail of Jerusalem contained, and found a man with three crimes laid to his charge, robbery, treason, and murder, each of which deserved death. It so happened that there were two other malefactors to be executed that day, but they were not bad enough to suit Pilate's purpose.

This savage reprobate Pilate selected to be put up for the people's choice, along with the harmless, the spotless, and the beneficent Jesus.

I need not explain how it came about, but so it was, the people vociferated, "Not this man, but Barabbas!" They desired a robber, a traitor, a murderer to be set at liberty, "when," as Peter

says, referring to Christ, Pilate was "determined to let him go," but Jesus they required to be crucified. Accordingly, Barabbas was set free, owing his liberty without question to the fact of his being side by side with Jesus, and Jesus instead of him being adjudged to the cross. Jesus was that day the substitute for Barabbas.

Let me picture what probably took place that morning. Barabbas, the pestilent traitor and murderer, is in irons in his cell. He hears footsteps outside. "They are coming," he mutters, "to lead me out to execution." The door opens. The jailer, with a lamp in his hand, steps forward, but instead of proceeding to bind his prisoner for death, he unlocks his chains, and Barabbas stands free. I could almost imagine the man hesitating whether he should not spring on his jailer, kill him, and run. But the jailer says, "Go, you are free." "Go! go whither?" "Go away from the prison. I have a warrant from the governor for your release." "But how is this?" asks Barabbas. "It is a custom at the feast," says the other, "for a criminal to be set at liberty, and that choice has fallen on you." "On me! how so? What friend had I to speak for me? I thought I was forsaken of all." "A man called Jesus was brought in on a charge before the governor. For some reason the governor gave the people their choice whether they would have him or you released; and they chose you."

"But why did they not choose one of my companions with fewer charges against him than I have?" "That I cannot tell you ; but now, begone, and see that you do not come to this dismal place again." I can well suppose that, later in the day, Barabbas might indulge a fancy to go forth with a friend to take a look, at some distance, at his two companions hanging on their crosses. He touches his neighbour's arm, and says, "Do you see the three crosses over yonder? Notice the middle one. Well, that is where I should have been. But for that man Jesus, who was put in my place, I should have been nailed between my two companions, to that middle cross ; for I was the chiefest criminal of all. How it came about is all a mystery to me."

You see, then, Barabbas escaped from temporal death, because Christ was, as his substitute, nailed to the cross. This, indeed, was but a temporal substitution, and had only temporal effect. Yet God evidently intended it as a shadow or figure of a higher substitution, with which eternal salvation is bound up.

As at Pilate's tribunal Jesus took the place of Barabbas, the very worst specimen of mankind that a Jewish jail could supply, and saved him thereby from a dreadful bodily death, so has He at the tribunal of God taken the place of the guiltiest and vilest, that by His substitution and endurance of the punishment that sin deserves, He might be able

to save the most criminal and most depraved of mankind.

It is a remarkable circumstance that at the very time when, by His substitution at Pilate's bar, He saved Barabbas from temporal death, He was, by His substitution at the bar of God, saving the other malefactor who was crucified with Him from eternal death.

Christ saves us then by becoming a substitute for us. If we accept of Him, His death will avail for us; but, if we reject Him, we must take the consequences.

PART III.

The Sufficiency of Christ to Deliver.—The Lord Jesus who died is not now on the cross. He rose again from the dead, and, having ascended to heaven He lives mighty to save, not from the punishment of sin alone, but from its tyranny and power, to make men good, dutiful, and holy. He is to-day full of tenderness and love, and is longing to deliver us. He is mighty to save. No sins are too great for Him to forgive, and no heart is too stubborn, too hard, for Him to soften and to change.

I lately had several interviews with a man who supplies me with a case in point. This man, twenty-six years ago, was guilty of the crime of murder. He was tried and condemned and sentenced to be hanged. Shortly before the day of execution, by

the Queen's clemency, a commutation of the sentence to penal servitude for life took place. Twenty-three years he spent in penal servitude. He then received a ticket-of-leave, which I myself have seen, and returned to the city where the crime was committed. Here he was discovered by one who had been his comrade on the night of the murder. This comrade had, some years before, been himself converted. "Have you been converted?" said he to the ticket-of-leave man. "How can you ask such a question?" he replied; "you know what I have done." "Is it your sins you mean?" said the other. "Yes," he replied. "Oh, that is no reason," said the other; "I will take you to a place where you will hear what may do you good." The issue was that he yielded to persuasion, went to a place of worship, which, strange to say, had been erected on the very spot where the evil deed long before had been done, was arrested by Divine grace, and changed; and, after careful consideration of all the circumstances by the pastor and elders of the church, he was admitted into full communion, and has since proved a useful labourer in the Gospel.

Very different is the power of Christ from that of all other saviours. I have heard of a ship that went on a reef on the African coast, at no great distance from the shore. The vessel was rapidly breaking up, and voyagers and crew were making shift as they best could to save their lives. Among those

on board was a gentleman who was an expert and powerful swimmer. He scanned with his eye the space between the ship and the shore, and felt persuaded that he was able to make his way through the breakers. But he had two others with him, weak and helpless beings, whose lives were dearer to him than his own. These were his wife and a sweet little child. What was he to do with them? He resolved to do what any brave man among you all would have attempted,—he made up his mind to try to save both. Accordingly, he persuaded his wife to attach herself to one of his shoulders. As for the child, he managed to tie the little thing to his other shoulder; and so this brave man, heavily but unequally weighted, gently let himself down from the deck into the sea. Boldly he struck out towards the shore. It was for dear life that his energies were strained. Now he rose with his burden on the crest of the wave, now he disappeared in the deep trough. Soon there was a considerable distance between him and the ship. Every moment the beautiful strand was rising more invitingly before his eyes. I think I hear him cheering his wife with the assurance of speedy safety, and then saying to the little child, "You are very cold, my darling; but you will soon be in your papa's and mamma's arms on the shore." And now the beach was well-nigh reached, when a horrible sensation crept over him. He felt that his strength was giving way. Thrusting

the idea from him, again he battled with the sea; but soon the dread sensation returned, and then it broke on him like a flash of lightning that to save both was impossible. One of them he might take to land, but not two. What was he to do? He could take no counsel. In a moment he had to make up his mind which of them to let go. Oh, may none of you ever be called to hold the balances of life over the dark abyss, like that unhappy man! "My wife," he said within himself, "has the first claim on me. I must try and save her at all hazards." And so it was the little child that must be dropped; and this father, who had cheered and encouraged his darling, had to bring over his hand, and unloose the fastenings which bound the little one to his shoulder, and push aside the small cold fingers. And then, like Paul at Melita, who, when he had escaped the sea, shook off into the fire the venomous reptile that had come out of the heat and had fastened upon his hand, this father had to cast off the child that clung to him, and see it go down for ever beneath the dark waters, never to look on it again. Ah! here was one who was willing to save, here was one that was longing to save, here was one that was straining to save, but then he was not—MIGHTY TO SAVE!

It is not so with the Lord Jesus. He is willing to save, He is waiting to save, He is yearning to save, but He is also mighty to save. No fear that any little child, whose mother has led him to

Jesus, and who has once been gathered with His arm, shall ever be flung aside to perish. If all of you who are seated on my right hand were to be seized with sudden impulse, and with one accord were to grasp Christ's arm, that arm would be strong enough to bear the weight of you all from the briny surge of your sins. And if all of you seated on my left were to grasp the other arm at the same moment, He would bear up, in like manner, all of you together. And were all of you who are seated in front of me to be seized with a similar impulse, and, casting yourselves within the arms of Jesus now, to take hold of His broad bosom and cling to it for refuge, there would be space enough on that breast for all, and room enough in His heart for every one.

You remember the very last words of Moses: “The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms.” There are only two arms in the universe that never weary, and these are the arms of Jesus. These arms He places underneath and around all poor sinners of whatsoever name, who cast themselves on Him, and trust for salvation in Him alone. “Him that cometh unto me,” He says, “I will in no wise cast out”—*i.e.*, He will not cast you *off*, if you come to Him; He will never cast you *out*, after you have come. I admit that some of those who do come sink at times very low; they fall into despondency, into temptation, into

despair. The corruption of the flesh, the power of old sins, the deceits and entanglements of backsliding, assert their fearful power, and the man goes down, down, down, low, low, low, lower, lower, lower! Hear how one of God's people speaks: "Thou hast laid me in the lowest pit, in darkness, in the deeps. Thy wrath lieth hard upon me, and thou hast afflicted me with all thy waves."¹ But however low we may sink, there is something lower still—"Underneath are the everlasting arms."

Jonah's sins found him out on shipboard in the storm. He was taken up and flung into the boiling surge. The monster of the deep opened its gaping jaws, and swallowed him up. He went down, down, down—the waters compassed him about even to the soul; the depth closed him round about; the weeds were wrapped about his head; he went down to the bottoms of the mountains; the earth with her bars was about him for ever. He went down; but however low he sank, there was something lower still—underneath were the everlasting arms, and in due time these arms "brought up his life from corruption," and with a hand whose fingers were gentler and softer than those of the most tender mother, set him down on the beach whence he was sent,—not to Gath-hepher nor Galilee, but over the wide desert to the "great city" of Central Asia, whose people were ignorant and wicked,—to proclaim there the power

¹ Psalm lxxxviii. 6, 7.

and love of the God of Israel, attested by his own history and deliverance, and so to call the people heartily to repentance. So shall it be with you, if you betake yourselves to Him. Oh, may God, by these His mighty arms, deliver you and send you out, when rescued from the deep, into the great city, whether at home or far away, to make known to those who sit in darkness, that undying love which brought the Son of God from heaven, and which has provided pardon, healing, peace, and purity, and a full redemption for all that believe in His name !

Amen.

IX.

CHRIST'S GARDEN.

"My beloved is gone down into his garden, to the beds of spices, to feed in the gardens, and to gather lilies."—Song of Sol. vi. 2.

PART I.

THE Song of Songs forms a portion of that Scripture all of which is said to be given by inspiration of God. It is a treasury of spiritual experience. The style is highly figurative. Under emblems drawn from human affection, Divine things are set forth. In mystic imagery, communion between Christ and His people is portrayed.

In the words we have chosen, the "Beloved" represents the Lord Jesus Christ, the Head and Husband of His redeemed. The "Garden" which He visits is His Church, comprising all who truly believe on Him and love Him in sincerity—the bride, the spouse, the wife of the Lamb.

This interpretation of the garden is supplied by the Beloved Himself: "A garden inclosed is my sister, my spouse" (chap. iv. 12).

Our subject to-day is CHRIST'S GARDEN. Let us consider :

The Similitude.—A garden is suggestive of pleasant ideas. We remember the garden of Eden, that scene of innocence and beauty, the charm of a yet unfallen world. The meaning of the word “paradise” is garden. God gave Eden as a paradise to Adam. The Church is the paradise that God gave to Christ. “Thy plants are an orchard ;” or, as it is in the original, “A paradise of pomegranates.”

The Plan.—Like other gardens, Christ's garden is laid out according to plan. What is the plan ? It is that of the Everlasting Covenant between Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. The size and figure of the garden, its boundaries, borders, and shady walks, the spot to be occupied by each plant, nay, the plant that is to occupy each spot, have all been set down in the plan of the Covenant. Compared with the wilderness of the unconverted world at this hour, Christ's garden may seem limited in its extent, and a feeling akin to disappointment at its being so, is natural on our part. But the garden, when completed, will be found to correspond in every respect with its plan. It will satisfy its possessor. “All that the Father giveth me shall come to me.” “Thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him.” “He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied.”

The Setting Apart.—Gardens are invariably marked off from the surrounding soil. Among ourselves they are generally taken in from the cultivated land. The garden of Eden was separated from a world of gardens ; but Christ's garden is reclaimed from "the great and terrible wilderness." All of those who now belong to the garden were at one time children of wrath, and enemies to God by wicked works. What maketh thee, Christian, to differ from another ? Sovereign grace alone. Who is this Joshua, the son of Josedech, the high priest ? "Is not this a brand plucked out of the fire ?" Believers, you know well that at one time you were far from God, lying as outcasts in the open field, but the Lord passed by. In majesty, in might, in mercy, He said unto you, "Live !" He washed you from your sins in His own blood ; He swathed you in His own comeliness ; He regenerated, justified, sanctified, and healed you. He put His Holy Spirit within you. Thus ye, who were "sometimes darkness," are now "light in the Lord." And your history to-day may be summed up in the words, "By the grace of God I am what I am."

When is it that a sinner is actually brought within the garden ? At his conversion. What is conversion ? Three things are implied in conversion. There is a renunciation, a reception, a surrender. That which is renounced is self, as our ground of confidence, and selfishness, as the principle of our conduct. In other words, the man

is convinced of sin, and relinquishes the world as his portion. That which is received is Christ Himself, as our righteousness, our life, and our hope. That which is surrendered to God is our will and our heart. Unless these three elements are combined in your experience, it is to be feared you have not yet undergone conversion. And is it not written, “Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven”?

The Fence.—Like others, Christ’s garden is fenced around. “A garden inclosed is my sister, my spouse.” A strong enclosure is indispensable. The garden lies in the very track of the whirlwind. It needs to be shielded from the sudden blasts of temptation, persecution, tribulation. It requires to be guarded from those noxious but invisible seeds that, rising from the wilderness around, are ever ready to deposit themselves and to take root, such as the contaminating influences of evil companionship and of the fashions of the world. It must have protection from the “boar out of the wood,” the great destroyer of souls, and from “thieves that break through and steal,” the lusts of the flesh, and the seductions of insidious scepticism; moreover, it needs a wall great and high, within whose privacy Christ may hold communion with His own. But if the garden requires an enclosure, it possesses one, the like of which no other garden on earth ever had. By what is it enclosed? It is environed by

the *Purposes of God*. "Whom he did predestinate, them he also called : and whom he called, them he also justified : and whom he justified, them he also glorified." It is enclosed by the *Promises of God*, the exceeding great and precious promises which are all yea and amen in Christ Jesus. Of these it is written, "The Scripture cannot be broken;" "Heaven and earth shall pass away : but my words shall not pass away." In connection with these "words," Jesus said, "But there shall not a hair of your head perish," as if to intimate that, however wild the tempest, it shall not be able to sever, within the garden, even a tiny rose-bud from its stem. It is surrounded by the *Righteousness of the Lamb*. The law is ever coming up with its formidable demands. Were there any breach of the wall in all its extent, the inexorable commandments would at once rush in, and with their terrible penalties lay low all within the garden. Is it not written, "Whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, is guilty of all"? But there is no cause for alarm. The Lord Jesus, as our surety, has satisfied all the law's demands, alike as to precept and penalty. He has finished transgressions, made an end of sins, made reconciliation for iniquity, and brought in everlasting righteousness.¹ Hark ! the voice of one within the enclosure ! "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect ? It is

¹ Dan. ix. 24.

God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.”¹ It is encompassed by the *Perfection of God*. God’s infallible wisdom, His omnipotent power, His inviolable justice, His immaculate holiness, His immutable faithfulness, His everlasting love—these are all in union for the salvation of Christ’s people. “Mercy and truth are met together, righteousness and peace have kissed each other.” And yet again, the garden is shut in and guarded around by the abiding *Presence of God*, according as it is written, “For I, saith the LORD, will be unto her a wall of fire round about.”² The Purposes, the Promises, the Righteousness, the Perfections, and the Presence of God—these are the safeguards, the bulwarks, the munition of rocks, by which God’s Israel are protected and separated from the world.

Have you reason to believe that you are indeed within the enclosure? The wish to be there is not enough; nor is proximity, however close to the gate, sufficient. In the days of Noah, as the ominous rain-drops began to fall, the ark was doubtless surrounded by a moaning crowd; and, when the deluge came, some would cling to its sides, others clamber upon its roof, and not a few may have even hung over the dark abyss for days; but none were

¹ Rom. viii. 33, 34,

² Zech. ii. 5.

saved but those who were *within* the ark. Safety for you there is none till you are really within the wall of the garden, till, like Paul, you are "found in Christ."

But again, if Christ be indeed between you and that wrath which sin deserves, be content to dwell within the enclosure. Pine not for any fancied happiness to be found outside and amid the vanities of the world. Remember that the wall, erected to keep the world from coming in to do you harm, is intended to keep you from going out into the world to harm yourself. Within the "everlasting arms" "Israel dwells in safety alone." "What hath Ephraim to do any more with idols?"

The Contents.—With regard to the contents, I have to make two general remarks. First, that all that properly belongs to Christ's garden has been planted by the proprietor Himself.

It is essential to the idea of a garden that what composes it should not spring up of its own accord, but be planted, assorted, and arranged by hand ; so it is with Christ's garden. True, as in ordinary gardens, weeds, noxious and troublesome, continually crop up of themselves ; so here, sins, alas—those pernicious weeds of the human soul—rise with native and persistent vigour in the heart ; but in both cases, though the weeds are in the garden, they are not of it. They form no part of what is recognised as the garden. All that is acknowledged to be of

the garden is "the planting of the Lord." Salvation is of grace. "That which is born of the flesh is flesh." "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." "We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them." That which the Lord accepts is of His own. "Every plant which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up." This applies to persons, institutions, doctrines, services, and experiences. What the Master gives, we give to Him again. Cain brought an offering to the Lord, goodly to look at. We may fancy a waggon laden with choice shrubs, surmounted by fruits and flowers of finest quality. The man was displeased that his carefully selected offering was not accepted. On the other hand, the little lamb with its drooping ears, which his brother led along and sacrificed, was at once, by Divine token, received. Why? Because the sacrifice of Abel was, in the circumstances, authorized of God. It contained what his brother's did not—an acknowledgment of sin, and of death, as the desert of sin, while it pointed to the Great Surety who was to come, "The Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world." When Nadab and Abihu, two fine young men, on the day of their consecration to the priesthood, brought strange fire,

and followed a ritual of their own, they were struck down by Divine fire, and perished before the Lord. Like Jonah on his great deliverance, we must be made to acknowledge that, from the first awakening of the soul till its entrance into glory, "salvation is of the Lord."

For myself, I desire to renounce all righteousness in me, as a ground of acceptance with God. "All our righteousnesses," says the prophet, "are as filthy rags." The only righteousness that will avail for me is one which has been wrought out for me by another, and He the Lord of Glory,—a righteousness given and imputed to the sinner, and received by faith alone. But this is not all. Even the faith by which the righteousness is received, is God's gift. That faith which springs from man's carnal heart is not faith that will stand the test ; it does not unite to Christ, nor sanctify the soul. The only faith that will avail for me is a faith which is heavenly in its origin, in its nature, and in its effects : "Faith which is of the operation of God." The righteousness which faith receives, and the faith that receives the righteousness, both are of the Lord. As with them, so of all good besides. "Of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption." While we so speak, be it remembered there is nothing in all this, which conflicts with the freest offer of the Gospel. The

command is clear to preach the Gospel to every creature under heaven, and heartily to invite the sinner, whoever he may be, to betake himself at once to the Lord Jesus for salvation. It is by means of this free and unlimited offer of Christ and His salvation, to sinners of every name and type and dye, that Christ's people are gathered in. Almost the last sentence of the Bible is a warrant for any sinner to come to Jesus, and it is this: "Who-soever will, let him take the water of life freely."

The second general remark I have to make is, that the garden is distinguished for its variety. Variety is essential to the idea of a garden. But for its variety, the enclosure might be designated a nursery, and not a garden. Christ's garden is characterized by variety. "A garden inclosed is my sister, my spouse; a spring shut up, a fountain sealed. Thy plants are an orchard of pomegranates, with pleasant fruits; camphire, with spikenard, spikenard and saffron; calamus and cinnamon, with all trees of frankincense; myrrh and aloes, with all the chief spices: a fountain of gardens, a well of living waters, and streams from Lebanon."¹

Who does not know that Christ's garden is to be made up of a multitude whom no man can number, of all nations and kindreds and people and tongues?

In His garden Christ will have specimens of all

¹ Song of Sol. iv. 12-15.

kinds of sinners, gathered from the world, to illustrate the efficacy of His blood and the riches of His mercy. He will have the borders stocked, not merely with the glorious company of the Apostles and the noble army of Martyrs, but with a mighty multitude of mighty sinners, saved by mighty grace. These shall be brought from the weary kingdoms of Europe; from the wild steppes and teaming cities of Asia; from the interior of down-trodden Africa; from the "icy mountains" of Greenland; from the plains of thriving Canada; from the enterprising States of North America; from the volcanic regions of Mexico and Guatemala; from the rivers' banks and pampas of Brazil and La Plata; from the cold tracts of Patagonia; and from the stormy Falklands; from the isles where the canary sings; where the great French exile expired; and where the sugar-plant rears its canes; from grand Madagascar; from the cinnamon groves of Ceylon; from the gold-fields of Australia; from the winding shores of New Zealand; from the isles where the clove and nutmeg shed their produce, where the bread-fruit tree expands its beautiful leaves, where the fronds of the cocoa-nut tree wave over the waters of the Pacific; and from dark New Guinea, where the bird of paradise flutters among the branches.

But this is not all. There is a charming variety in Christ's garden, arising from diversity in the display and development of Grace in those planted

within its enclosure. In this garden you will find the vine with its fruitfulness, the olive with its fatness, the fig-tree with its sweetness, the pomegranate with its juices, the orange with its "vegetable-gold." Here we have the beautiful rose; there the graceful and delicate lily; yonder the calamus, and trees of frankincense. Of Christ's plants some are more distinguished for their form others for their foliage, others for their brilliancy of colour, others for their fragrance, others for their useful qualities. Some stand out conspicuously, and are seen to most advantage when growing alone; others rejoice in the sympathy of their kind, and look prettiest when in group. Some thrive best in the moist soil of affliction; some even prefer the cold borders of the snow. Others spring from the crevices of the rock, and climb vigorously over difficulties and opposition. Some demand a sunny exposure, and spread themselves along the wall. Some need a rill of living water to be ever flowing at their roots; others, and these not the least beautiful, have the liquid surface for their home. Some, orchid-like, contrive to live almost without visible means of sustenance; others retreat into shady nooks and caves, "being strengthened unto all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness."

It is probable that the profuse variety in the development of grace among different individuals is due in part to the diversity of natural constitution,

with which grace comes in contact. Here we find Abel, with his righteousness ; and Enoch, with his holy walk ; Noah, with his steadfastness ; Abraham, with his faith ; Sarah, with her wifely reverence ; Melchizedek, grandest, as I take it, of the sons of Ham ; Eliezer, the servant, with his conscientiousness ; Isaac, with his fear of the Lord ; Rebecca, with her alacrity at the call of God ; Jacob, with his power in prayer ; Joseph, with his filial and fraternal love ; Job, the Gentile, with his patience ; Moses, the lawgiver, with his meekness ; Aaron, with his stillness under the rod of God ; Miriam, with her timbrel of praise, and all her " Jubilee Singers " by the sea ; Joshua, with his courage ; Jethro, the Midianite, with his sagacity ; Caleb, with his full following of the Lord ; Phinehas, with his zeal ; Rahab of Jericho, who received God's messengers with peace ; Jabez, the honourable with his largeness of request ; Deborah, with her patriotism ; Gideon, with his magnanimity ; Ruth, the Moabitess, with her attachment to God's people ; Hannah, who brought up her little child to abide before the Lord for ever ; old Eli, who trembled for the ark of God ; Samuel, with his singleness of heart ; lovely Jonathan, with his disinterestedness ; David, with his many-coloured experience ; Obed-edom, who welcomed the ark within his dwelling ; Heman, afflicted from youth upward, yet ever clinging to his God ; towering Solomon,

with his wisdom ; the boy Abijah, a lily of the valley taken from the thorns ; Jehoiada, the venerable, who did good in Israel, both towards God and towards His house ; Elijah, with his fearlessness of man ; Elisha, with his faithfulness amid prevalent apostasy ; the Shunammite, with her contentment ; prickly Jonah, from the stormy seashore, abasing self, but ever exalting God ; Amos, the wild orchid from the pastures of Tekoa ; Hezekiah, with his godly sincerity ; Manasseh, rarest specimen in the Old Testament of a sinner saved by grace, crimsoned over with the deep flush of repentance ; Josiah, with his tenderness of heart ; Isaiah, all aglow with the promises of God ; Jeremiah, with his plain-tiveness ; Ezekiel, dark with Divine mysteries ; Habakkuk, bright with his joy in God ; Daniel, with his intrepid decision ; and, near him, three conspicuous plants, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, with their unfaltering loyalty to God ; Zerubabel, the prince, waiting for the second temple's glory ; Ezra, the scribe, with his delight in the law of the Lord ; Nehemiah, the governor, with his nobility of soul ; and queenly Esther, with her care for the children of her people.

And, over a little way, Mary of Nazareth, with her lowliness ; the shepherds of Bethlehem, who bloomed before the dawn ; the Persian sages, with their star-like constancy ; old Simeon, with his lively hope ; John the Baptist, with his uncom-

promising fidelity ; ingenuous Andrew, with his brotherly regard ; Nathanael, with his guilelessness ; Nicodemus, rich and learned, with his earnest inquiry after truth ; the Samaritan pitcher-plant, with her tiny cups of living water ; the centurion of Capernaum, with his humility ; the demoniac of Decapolis, with his enthusiasm ; the Syro-phœnician, with her importunity ; Peter, with his ardour ; John, with his assurance of his Master's love ; the other apostolic fishers, Christ's lilies of the lake ; Mary of Bethany, with her blessed choice ; the woman of the city, with gratitude's delicate perfume ; the beggar Bartimeus, with his inflexible resolution ; Zaccheus, the publican, with his promptness to receive the Lord ; the malefactor, like the night-flowering cereus, bursting into beauty amid the darkness at Calvary ; the centurion at the cross, the flower that opened as Jesus was passing into paradise ; Mary Magdalene, the rose of the resurrection morn ; Stephen, with his martyr's crown ; Dorcas, with her charities to the widowed and the poor ; the Ethiopian treasurer, with his simplicity ; Cornelius of Cæsarea, chief captain of all the Gentiles ; Paul, with his absorbing devotion to the cross of Christ ; good Barnabas, with his gladness at the success of others ; Eunice, who taught her son the Scriptures from his earliest youth ; Timothy, with his unselfish readiness to serve ; Lydia, with her kindness to the servants of Jesus ; the jailer

of Philippi, that blossomed at midnight with all his house ; Apollos, with his mightiness in the Scriptures ; Aquila and Priscilla, who had a church in their house ; Philip, the evangelist, and his daughters, fragrant with the aroma of prophecy ; Corinthian Gaius, with his hospitality ; beloved Persis, who laboured much in the Lord ; Epaphroditus, with his pastoral sensibility ; Epaphras, the Colossian azalea, white all over with the snow-flowers of intercession ; Philemon, who refreshed the weary saints of Jesus ; Onesiphorus, who solaced the Lord's prisoner in his chains ; John Mark, expanding with splendid tints in the autumn of his days ; Luke, with his friendship that no trials could impair ; the elect lady, with her charming sons ; and, not to speak of a host of others, that pretty flower-bed of little children whom Jesus took up in His arms, put His hands upon, and blessed.

Oh, exquisite variety ! exquisite variety ! Happy indeed are they who have a place in so fair a scene ! How then should there be jealousy, discord, and strife among those who are plants in one garden of the Heavenly King ? Shall I be inflated because I think I possess some quality in which I perceive a brother to be defective ? or shall my bosom rankle with envy because I discern some excellency in another which is wanting in myself ? The garden of the Lord Jesus is the one place where

rancour, feud, dissension, and bitterness should be unknown. Around it the Lord would have the world gather, so as to behold something of heaven within, and that His claims as Saviour and King may be recognised. The one mark, selected by Himself, by which He would have His garden make impression on the world, is that it present the embodiment of love. "A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another."

PART II.

The Crowning Excellency of the Garden.—It may seem hard to show what is the distinguishing ornament of a spot where all is so lovely; but in truth it is not so. The grand excellency of the garden is the Lord Jesus Christ Himself: "My beloved is gone down into his garden." Nor is there a mixture of metaphors here. What was the chief ornament of Paradise? Was it not man made in the image of God, immortal, intelligent, holy? And as with the first Adam in Eden, so with the second and last in the spiritual garden; Christ the Lord from heaven, in whom the Father shines, is of it the crowning excellency. Eden became a poor place when Adam was exiled from it, and the garden of the new covenant would be desolate

indeed were the presence of Immanuel withdrawn from it. “For I, saith the LORD, will be unto her a wall of fire round about, and will be the *glory in the midst of her.*”¹

What would a church be, however admirable its structure, if Christ were not within it? what a synod, convocation, or general assembly, however learned its members? what a congregation, however estimable its office-bearers and people? What would Christ’s own ordinances be? what the Holy Supper? what the discipline of affliction? what a believer’s heart, even though inlaid with graces, if Christ Himself were not in all of these? It is not enough that we have His Scriptures, His institutions, His ministry, His messages. It is Himself we must have with us. Is not this His promise, “Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them”?

My Beloved is gone down into His garden. The Great Beloved entered His garden in Jerusalem on the evening of the first day of the week, when suddenly appearing in the midst of His disciples, the doors being shut, He said unto them, “Peace be unto you.” When He had so said, He showed them His hands and His side. Soon did the lilies recognise His presence. “Then were the disciples glad when they saw the Lord.” Again, at the river’s side at Philippi, He opened the heart of

¹ Zech. ii. 5.

Lydia, and entered into His garden ; and does He not do the same when, knocking at our heart, He comes in and sups with us ? We ought always to cherish the expectation of His coming into His garden. Were not these among His latest sayings ? “ I will not leave you comfortless : I will come to you ; ” “ If a man love me, he will keep my words : and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him.” In these latter words the Saviour is represented as on His way to the garden. But, lo, He comes not alone ! A mysterious companion is with Him. They are holding communion as they approach. It is the Father who is with the Beloved Son. “ My Father will love him,” says Jesus, “ and *we* will come unto him, and make our abode with him.” Does not this help us to understand the words, “ Truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ ” ?

Let me ask you, professing Christians, whether you have known anything of this communion with Christ the Son, and with the Father ? Jesus promises to those who love Him and keep His word, “ I will manifest myself to him.” Has He ever manifested Himself to you ? If not, have you considered why He has not done so ? Again, He says, “ Yet a little while and the world seeth me no more, but ye see me.” Have you so seen Him ? This seeing of Christ with the eyes of the soul is the

privilege of all Christ's true people. Have you known what it is to find the Lord? Are you, while attending His ordinances, always on the outlook for Christ? Is it Christ who, as I speak, is the object of which you are in quest? It is a melancholy thing that sermons are sometimes preached in which well-nigh all notice of Christ is omitted; but there is something which is perhaps more melancholy still,—when a congregation listens to such a sermon and never detects the omission; Christ has not only not been there, but He has not even been missed! It is to be feared that, in the matter of communion with Christ, little is practically known in our day. How few can aver, "I sat down under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste"! See how even the Old Testament believers could speak. What says David the king? "One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in his temple."¹ How could David so speak? David was not a priest according to the Jewish law, nor was he dissatisfied with his condition as king; but he knew that, according to the new covenant, he was a priest unto God and the Father, and that whether he roamed amid the mountains of Judah and the vales of his native Bethlehem, or had his dwelling in his ceiled house on Mount Zion, he

¹ Psalm xxvii. 4.

could at all times dwell in the house of the Lord, and behold the King in His beauty. It is the privilege of Israel to be a people near to the Lord. While that nearness to God lasts, the soul cannot be thrown down; nothing can interfere with its tranquillity. Persecution, obloquy, and the annoyances of the world, whether serious or petty, can do it no harm. More than this, communion with God is the Christian's strength. No adversary can prevail against him who abides in such communion; and while it continues this will be true of us as of Joshua, "There shall not any man be able to stand before thee all the days of thy life."¹ See then that there be maintained a free and open passage between you and the Lord Jesus. Only while it remains unobstructed will you be able to get deliverance from those cares that, even on the Christian, press at times so heavily. If the passage continues unimpeded, the cares will glide easily from you, and be caught up and disposed of by Him who invites you to cast your burden on Him. But should the way be clogged by the rubbish of unbelief, worldliness, sensuality, pride, passion, quarrelling at home, strife among Christians, neglect of secret prayer, omission of duty, untruthfulness, or intemperance, the burdens will not be able to get away. They will roll back on you, to your sore discomfort and injury.

Seek, then, uninterrupted nearness to the Lord

¹ Josh. i. 5.

Jesus ; and, when interruption to communion does occur, do not rest till a fresh application of the precious blood has been made to the conscience, and the Lord by His grace has restored your soul. “Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.” In the season of deepest drought there are still “streams from Lebanon.”

PART III.

Reasons why the Beloved goes down into His Garden.—I. The first of these reasons, though not specified in the verse before us, is abundantly alluded to in the Song of Songs. It is *to behold the beauty of the garden*. The high employment and enjoyment of the saints when they enter heaven, as is told us, are to behold the glory of Christ ;¹ but, when the Beloved comes down from heaven to visit earth, it is to behold the beauty of His people.

The language used by Him in describing that beauty is extraordinary. Only think of His saying with regard to them, “Thou art all fair, my love ; there is no spot in thee” !² Can these words apply to any one ? You exclaim, “I know that I am all defiled. My whole being is tainted with sin. Did not even Job, the holiest man of his time, cry aloud, ‘I am vile,’ ‘I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes’ ? If such were his words, what might

¹ John xvii. 24.

² Song of Sol. iv. 7.

mine be ? ” It is true. Job spake so, and he spake aright. And so does it become you and me to speak. Nevertheless, Christ says of His people now, “ There is no spot in thee. ” Nay, He thus addresses them, as under a sense of unworthiness they shrink aloof, “ O my dove, that art in the clefts of the rock, in the secret places of the stairs, let me see thy countenance, let me hear thy voice ; for sweet is thy voice, and thy countenance is comely. ”¹ Now what is the explanation of this ? There is only one sense in which it can be said of any one on earth that he is without spot. The only perfect righteousness which it is possible for a sinner to possess is the righteousness of Jesus. The beauty which Christ beholds in His people is His own. “ Thy renown went forth among the heathen for thy beauty : for it was perfect through my comeliness, which I had put upon thee, saith the Lord God. ”² Pointing to the lilies of the field, Jesus said, “ I say unto you, that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. ” And why ? Because God clothes the lilies, whereas Solomon clothed himself. But the clothing of the lilies of the covenant excels that of the lilies of the field, as much as the beauty of the latter excels the glory of Solomon. And why ? Because the beauty of Christ's believing people is not merely Christ's gift, but that beauty is really Christ's own. Is it not written, “ God hath made

¹ Song of Sol. ii. 14.² Ezek. xvi. 14.

him to be sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him”? “This is the name whereby he shall be called, THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.” “Ineffable exchange,” says the grand old French reformer;¹ “the Innocent is condemned, and the criminal acquitted. The Blessing is cursed, and he that was cursed is blessed. The Life dies, and the dead live. The Glory is covered with shame, and he who was put to shame is covered with glory.” Or, again, as one who lived in our own isle has so prettily said,² “I want his fountain every day, his intercession every moment. I would not give a groat for the broadest fig-leaves, or the brightest human rags to cover me. A robe I must have, of one whole piece, broad as the law, spotless as the light, richer than an angel ever wore—the robe of Jesus.”

“Whence is it,” said a friend of mine, long since passed away, to another still dearer departed friend, the companion of my youth,³ “Whence is it that you contrive to maintain such unbroken peace as you seem to enjoy?” My friend replied, “When I become sad, I draw my chair towards the hearth, and I think of my sins. I go over the sins of my childhood, of my youth, of my manhood, and of my ministry. I go over my sinful actions, words, and

¹ Lefèvre, Professor in the Sorbonne, 1512.

² Rev. John Berridge, of Everton.

³ Rev. Robert Murray McCheyne.

thoughts, and confess them before God; and then I take my bad actions and cover them with Christ's good actions, I take my bad words and cover them with Christ's good words, and I take my bad thoughts and cover them with Christ's good thoughts; and so, wrapping myself in the righteousness of Jesus, I go to the Father."

2. *The Beloved goes down into His garden to enjoy the spices.*—What may these spices be? Spice plants, like others, are visible enough; but the spices which the Lord here seeks are the powerful but invisible fragrance emitted by these plants. "Awake, O north wind; and come, thou south; blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out."

We may interpret then the spices to be the invisible things possessed by Christ's people, alike precious and penetrating—such as the hidden thoughts, desires, emotions, affections, and inward experiences of the Christian's heart; the language and breathings of the renewed mind; the secret principles which regulate conduct; the faith, hope, and love with which the bosom is charged. Such are the unseen spices in which Christ takes delight. When these are absent, Jesus complains, "Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love."¹

May we not believe that Christ is bending over some assembled here at this moment, and is regaled

¹ Rev. ii. 4.

with the fragrance of faith and love rising from their hearts? He can discern what escapes the notice of His choicest disciples. When Mary of Bethany broke the alabaster box and poured its contents on His head, the disciples were offended. The house was filled with the odour of the ointment, and they grudged the waste which, as they thought, had occurred. Jesus told them there were other ingredients of far greater price in the perfume, which they had failed to discover, and that she had done well to expend all as she had. What were these unrecognised aromatics? The spices of faith and love. "Let her alone," He said, "she hath done what she could: she is come aforehand to anoint my body to the burying."

There is one spice in the garden in which the Saviour finds special gratification. He never passes the place where it grows without tarrying for a long time at the spot. So precious, indeed, is it in His estimation, that He tells us He comes from heaven to earth in quest of it. "But are not all good things to be met with in heaven?" you ask. "What is there of value here that may not be gathered there in abundance?" True; still as on earth some plants in much request prefer very unattractive localities, so it is with regard to this spice. I admit there is something very like it in heaven; yet the peculiar species I refer to is to be found only in this bleak world. You wonder what the spice can be?

"Would that it were in my heart," you say, "that Christ might tarry beside me!" What can it be? It is the spice of a *broken and contrite heart*! "For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I *dwell*"—observe He tarries—"in the high and holy place, with *him also*"—observe He comes to earth—"that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones."¹ "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise."²

How different is the condition of unconverted men from that of those within the garden! Of them Christ says, "Their inward part is very wickedness; their throat is an open sepulchre; they flatter with their tongue."

3. *He comes to the garden to partake of the fruits,*—"To feed in the gardens." Spices are good, but they are not sufficient. The Saviour, when He visits His garden, plucks the fruit as well as enjoys the spices. What is this fruit? If the spices represent the invisible things about Christ's people, may we not interpret the fruit to be those products of grace which are visible, palpable, and substantial? When Jesus was passing at early morn along the slope of Olivet, being hungry, He saw a fig-tree a little way off His path, covered with leaves. As it

¹ Isa. lvii. 15.

² Psalm li. 17.

is the nature of that tree to produce fruit along with the leaves, Jesus repaired to it for supply; but, when He had searched the branches for fruit, He found none,—“Nothing but leaves.” That tree with leaves of vain promise is an emblem of you, fruitless and empty professor. Take care that Jesus come not to you, seeking fruit, and finding none. What is the gracious fruit for which Christ looks? Such fruit as integrity of conduct, truthfulness of speech, purity of life, humility of mind, meekness under provocation, patience in affliction, dutifulness in all relationships, a holy and circumspect walk, liberality towards the kingdom of God, the careful up-bringing of your family—in fine, the charities and good works wrought by the regenerate man. “If ye love me,” says Christ, “keep my commandments.” “Love” is the spice; “keeping the commandments,” the fruit. No keeping of the commandments without love; no love without keeping the commandments. In such fruit Christ takes delight. Deceive not your souls, should you lack it. “Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.”

4. Last of all, *the Beloved goes down into His garden to gather lilies.* Jesus enters His garden to admire, to inhale, and to partake. Shall we

wonder if, as He steps along the walks, He stoops to pluck a pretty flower, or to gather a handful of lilies. Shall we grudge Him any of these? Nay, who planted them? for whom do they bloom, and raise their beautiful heads? Shall we murmur if He take from the garden what pleases Him? Every now and again in our congregations Jesus turns aside to gather lilies. What are these lilies? Sometimes it is a sweet and artless babe, that fades and pines and dies in its mother's arms; but not before the Lord has numbered the little one among the twice-born. Sometimes it is a young man about to enter on the business of life, who, suddenly stricken by some fatal malady, droops and passes away; but not before his eye has learned to glisten at the mention of Jesus' name, and a response has been made by him to the loving call, "My son, give me thine heart." Now it is a maiden opening into the bloom of womanhood, perhaps preparing to adorn a new home, and to lend a charm to a whole circle of loving friends, who is mysteriously cut down by insidious disease; but not till that voice has thrilled her soul, "Daughter, be of good comfort; thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace." Or perhaps it is the fond and gentle mother herself, she who has striven to lead all her children to Jesus, who in a moment is snatched away. Or it is the venerable and godly father, the diligent Sabbath-school teacher, the eminent Chris-

tian worker, the useful elder, the indefatigable pastor, or the world-needed missionary. Ah, the loveliest and most valued seem to be taken indiscriminately away! But shall we say that, in any case, the event has been premature, or that the time and circumstances have been ill chosen, or that it had been better the plant had been spared a little longer to adorn the spot where it grew? Let no such thoughts be cherished. If Jesus gather the lily, it is because "the Lord hath need of it." He would have it to be nearer to Himself. May we say, "Let Him take what He pleases, and do what He will with His own." Let us try to be like Job. That holy man was standing beside a cluster of lilies that he was wont to call his own, and which he used to water every morning with his prayers, when the Lord, passing by, gathered all the ten away! For an instant, we may believe, his lips quivered and his cheek turned pale; but if so, it was only to fall down immediately at the Master's feet, and to say, "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." Do not imagine that the lily is lost when Jesus gathers it. We may weary of the flowers we pluck, or let the lily drop from our hand in a moment of forgetfulness; or even, if we continue to hold it, the lily, tended with utmost care, will fade in our hand, and all its sweetness pass away. It is not so with the lily that Jesus gathers. The flower never loses its

novelty for Him. He will not let it fall, nor will it part with any of its fragrance while He keeps it by Him. No; He has told us, "They shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand," and "I give unto them eternal life." All the lilies Jesus has ever gathered, from the days of Abel till the present hour, are as fair, as fresh, and as fragrant as when they were plucked from the earth.

The Persian kings of old dwelt in a royal residence which they called Shushan the Palace. The meaning of Shushan is lily. Why did they call their palace so? Was it because the monarch considered himself to be the lily of his empire? or because he had gathered around him all that was noble and beautiful in his realm? Whatever may have been the reason, this I know, that there never was, nor ever shall be, any true Shushan the Palace but one—that "house of many mansions," where Jesus has gone to prepare a place for His own. There the Lily of lilies Himself ever dwells; and there all the lilies of the covenant, gathered from this earth, are gradually assembling around Him—that great congregation of the righteous, from which none who have ever believed in His name shall be amissing in the day of His glory.

May it be my blessed lot, unworthy though I am, when life's busy day is done, to be gathered away by the Great Beloved to Himself; and can I wish for a happier issue for you than that, when your

work-day is spent, the Great Beloved may gather you as His lilies to be with Him in the Shushan above ; where the blight of sin, of shame, of sorrow, of separation, shall never come ; where the breath of the Destroyer shall never wither up beauty ; and where, in the Divine sunshine, you shall bloom in the atmosphere of perfect love, purity, and peace for evermore ? Amen.

X.

CHRIST AND THE PROMISES.

“For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by us, even by me and Silvanus and Timotheus, was not yea and nay, but in him was yea. For all the promises of God in him are yea, and in him Amen, unto the glory of God by us.”—
2 Cor. i. 19, 20.

AS I was coming to you to-day, my path led me by a tasteful enclosure, into which I was bold enough to enter. It was a vinery, not like those of the open field, so common in Palestine, France, and Germany, but a spacious and elegant conservatory. A succession of thriving stems, twisted in form, but vigorously climbing the glass wall of the structure, at once met my eye. The long arms of the plants, with their delicate tendrils, were carefully trained along the under side of the crystal roof. The branches were covered with fresh green leaves, through whose fine tissues the sunlight agreeably passed. But what delighted me most was the rare assortment of green and purple clusters that hung above me, like inverted cones or pyramids, from amid the foliage. Their luscious beauty quite

arrested me. As I stood admiring, the proprietor of the conservatory, with whom I had the happiness of being a little acquainted, came in. Observing my looks, he kindly asked me if I would have a cluster, and at once he proceeded to cut down a bunch for me. The grapes were very sweet. Then, noticing that I still continued my gaze, he said, "Perhaps you would wish to take a few clusters home with you?" To this I replied, that I was at the time on my way to a company of friends, whose lips were no doubt as parched as my own had been, and that I was sure there were some among them who would be as much delighted with a cluster as myself. On which he stepped aside, and, having brought out a commodious and suitable basket, he inlaid it with vine leaves. He then cut down some of the finer clusters, and, placing these carefully on the leaves, he took the basket aside, and, while his back was towards me, shut down the cover, so as to secure the delicious but fragile contents from injury. Coming forward with a pleasant smile, he handed me the basket, saying, "Take this; it contains a few bunches. Share them among your friends, and give a cluster to any one whom you find prepared to receive it."

And here I am, with the basket in my hand! Let me set it down and raise the cover, so neatly fastened, and, before proceeding further, hand some of the clusters to you on this thirsty afternoon. Be

assured, it will afford me as much pleasure to distribute them as it will give you to receive them.

Such is my parable, for parable it is,—perhaps to the disappointment of some of the younger of my auditory. The beautiful clusters I have spoken of represent the PROMISES OF GOD, those exceeding great and precious promises, in which the blessings of the everlasting covenant are stored up, and by which we are said to become “partakers of the divine nature.”¹

Now let me open the basket, and take out a few of its delicate specimens. Ah, here is a beauty! We must handle it softly. See how symmetrical in shape, how perfect in form, is each grape! The fruit seems as if it would melt on the lips. What are the terms of this promise? Listen!

*“Fear thou not; for I am with thee:
Be not dismayed; for I am thy God:
I will strengthen thee;
Yea, I will help thee;
Yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of
my righteousness.”*²

Let me describe the cluster for an instant, ere handing it to you. You will agree with me that this is a promise fitted to cheer the despondent, impart courage to the timid, and to revive the faint and weary. Your soul is cast down. Well—does not

¹ 2 Pet. i. 4.

² Isa. xli. 10.

God's loving voice sound out its glorious accents, "Fear not"? Your adversaries are numerous and mighty. You are worn out by conflict within and by fightings without. You look around for sympathy and aid, but no one has the heart or the courage to succour you. Your sense of loneliness is overpowering. Perhaps your keenest wounds have been inflicted, alas! by Christ's friends. You are ready to sink in deep dejection. How delightful then the words, "Fear thou not; for I am with thee"! Your spirit has been weighed down by doubt and misgiving. Your sins and backslidings have come up against you. The thought of your transgression has, like the appearance of "the handwriting on the wall," paralyzed you. You dread that God has forsaken you, and will remember His mercy toward you no more. But hearken! Do not these words come to you with sweetness and power, as the music at midnight amid Bethlehem's hills, "Be not dismayed; for I am thy God"? It may be you cannot say, "He is my God;" but lo! God Himself breaks the oppressive silence, and says, "I am thy God." You may be hesitating whether to yield to the tempter, or you may be trembling lest he should prevail. You may be wavering under the strain of your sensibilities and anxieties, and be disquieted lest you should go down in the struggle with unbelief, corruption, provocation, and disappointment. But see! what have we here? Good and comforting

encouragement indeed ! “ I will strengthen thee ; yea, I will help thee ; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness.”

Take, then, the goodly cluster. It has revived many a forlorn heart. It can do the same for yours.

You put forth your hand to receive it. But how is this ? Your hand is withdrawn. What is amiss ? Do you imagine there is something unsuitable in the promise, something unwholesome about the fruit, that you shrink from what is offered to you in that fashion ?

“ Ah, no,” you say ; “ it is not on that account I hesitate. The promise is good, the fruit is delicious ; but I have too much reason to fear that the cluster is not intended for me.”

Not intended for you ! How so ?

“ No ; the promise is evidently one given to God’s own drooping people ; to true believers, though weak ; to the Lord’s Israel ; to those, in short, who have received Christ to the saving of the soul. In my own case, I have, alas ! only too good reason to fear that I do not yet belong to the children of God. I am haunted by a persuasion that I have never been converted, that I have never believed aright, and that I am still unsaved. My agonizing dread is, that I am yet a child of wrath. God does not say to the unconverted soul, ‘ Fear thou not ; ’ nor does He say to any one still in a state of rebellion, ‘ I am thy

God.’ No, no ; let those take the delightful promise who can ! I do not see that it is intended for me !”

So you cannot accept of the Great Vinekeeper’s gift ! Well, I shall lay the cluster down gently beside me, and will look into the basket again. Perhaps I may find a cluster that will suit you. Ah, here is one ! almost, nay I would say quite, as lovely as the other.

*“ Fear not : for I have redeemed thee,
I have called thee by thy name ; thou art mine.
When thou passest through the waters,
I will be with thee ;
And through the rivers, they shall not overflow
thee :
When thou walkest through the fire,
Thou shalt not be burned ;
Neither shall the flame kindle upon thee.
For I am the Lord thy God, the Holy One of
Israel, thy Saviour.”*¹

Who would not prize a cluster like this ? Its alluring beauty cannot be surpassed. Let me give it to you at once. Ah, your eager hand is stretched out to receive it ! Pray handle it carefully. But how is this ? The arm falls to the side a second time. You hold aloof, with a painful expression in your eye. Won’t you have this promise ? Surely there is nothing about it that can hurt you ?

¹ Isa. xliii. 1-3.

"Oh no," you reply. "Hurt me? Never! Such a promise as that is the very one that I need. It is one that suits my case in every way. My soul has indeed been in 'deep waters.' My iniquities, like the floods, have gone over my head. My protracted and hopeless weakness, my incessant pain, my many bereavements, my domestic sorrows, my anxieties about some whose life is dearer to me than my own, the loss of my firstborn, the sinking of heart which the conduct of some of my relatives has occasioned me, trials in my family of which I cannot speak to any one, a heart broken by unkindness,—all these are to me like the waves of a dark river. Indeed, to change the figure, I may say I have been in a furnace of affliction for years."

Well, I am glad that I have alighted on a promise so likely to meet your circumstances. Its language seems almost an echo of what you have been saying to me. "Deep waters," "a furnace of affliction." Why, look at the promise. The very words are there.

"Nay," you reply, "this promise is as far out of my reach as the other. How is it introduced? 'Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine.' What reason have I for supposing that I belong to Him? Oh, happy they who can cherish such a hope! For my part, I cannot think He ever said to me, 'Thou art mine.' When did He ever call me by my name?"

Could I believe He did so, I would leap for joy. The greatest grief I have ever had is my utter uncertainty as to my acceptance with Him. I would willingly appropriate the promise if I dared; but appropriate it, you see, I cannot!”

You puzzle me somewhat. I am a little at a loss how to act. I must lay this cluster of promise beside the other. I am unwilling to be baffled in my wish to cheer you. Let me look into the basket again. Ah, here is a cluster! By its colour, I can see it has been taken from the upper part of the conservatory (the New Testament). Seldom have I seen one more symmetrically hung. What are the terms of this promise?

*“Let your conversation be without covetousness;
And be content with such things as ye have:
For he hath said,
I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.”*¹

Surely this is like the richest ornaments of the vineyards of Engedi.

You extend your hand with a smile; but again your eyelids droop, and your arm falls, as if smitten with paralysis. I see the tears are coursing down your cheeks. What can be the matter with you now?

“Oh,” you exclaim, “that indeed is the very promise for me! ‘I will never leave thee, nor

¹ Heb. xiii. 5.

forsake thee.' It seems as if I were the most solitary of human beings. You cannot imagine what a lonely creature I am. My case is as if all had forsaken me, and that I had no one left to care whether I were living or dead. My father and mother have left me; my beloved spouse has left me; all my children have left me,—some are in the cold grave, others are beyond the sea; my brothers and sisters have left me; my business, my trade, has left me; my property has left me. Every earthly comfort has left me; my eyesight has left me; my usefulness has left me; my courage and spirit have left me; my health has left me; church ordinances are fast leaving me. I think that even my mental faculties will, ere long, have left me. You may wonder at my words, but it seems to me as if nothing were left me to hope for on earth."

Well, my poor friend, is not this the very promise for you, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee"?

"Ah," you say, "tell it to me again. It sounds in my ear more sweetly than the concords of angels."

Then why not welcome the promise, and receive the consolation it offers you?

"Ah," you reply, "my heart warmed as you uttered the promise, but it was soon stricken as by arctic frost. To whom does the Lord speak thus? Surely not to every one! He does not say to the unconverted man in his rebelliousness, 'I will never

leave thee, nor forsake thee.' The promise is without doubt intended for Christians, and for them only. But, alas! I do not know that I am a Christian. This is my most poignant sorrow, that I fear I am yet a stranger to saving grace. If I could only believe that God said these words to me, old as I am, I would bound from the earth with gladness. But to believe so is what I cannot do."

Then I must lay this goodly cluster beside the other two. It is certainly most discouraging to find that none of these exquisite messages can be appropriated by you. I am at a loss. I begin to fear I shall not be able to lay my hand on any promise that will suit you. But stay; let me make one other attempt. I shall look into the basket once more. I have made careful search among the clusters that remain. Here is one that has something about it that seems to meet your emergency. But, to make assurance doubly sure, let me take out another cluster at the same moment, and hold up both together. Here they are, one in either hand.

"Fear not, thou worm Jacob,"

(Pray, pay particular regard to that word "worm").

"Fear not, thou worm Jacob, . . .

*When the poor and needy seek water,
And there is none"*

(Notice, I beseech of you, these words, "there is none,")

*“ And their tongue faileth for thirst,
I the Lord will hear them,
I the God of Israel will not forsake them.
I will open rivers in high places,
And fountains in the midst of the valleys :
I will make the wilderness a pool of water,
And the dry land springs of water.
I will plant in the wilderness the cedar, the shittah
tree, and the myrtle, and the oil tree ;
I will set in the desert the fir tree, and the pine,
and the box tree together ;
That they may see, and know, and consider, and
understand together,
That the hand of the Lord hath done this.”*¹

Such is the one promise. Now, listen to the other.

“ And I will bring the blind ”

(Notice the word “ blind ”).

*“ And I will bring the blind by a way that they
knew not ;
I will lead them in paths that they have not
known :
I will make darkness light before them,
And crooked things straight.
These things will I do unto them,
And not forsake them.”*²

¹ Isa. xli. 14, 17-20.

² Isa. xlii. 16.

Now, timid and desponding heart, so ready to write bitter things against yourself, surely “the worm,” and “the blind,” those who “seek water, and there is none,” represent doubting and discouraged persons like you. I see a pleasant smile play on your features. These precious words have fitted your case at last. You extend your hand; but, alas! your arm drops down helplessly as before.

“I cannot take these promises,” you exclaim, and there is anguish in your eye. “No, not one of them! Oh! what am I to do? These latter promises certainly come nearer to me than any of the others; for indeed I am poor and needy, and I seek water and there is none. But still I fear the words are not for me. When you spoke about the ‘worm,’ I thought, ‘That is a description of myself;’ but then, I observe, it is the ‘worm Jacob’ that is bid not to fear. It is the covenant worm, the covenant people, who are spoken to under the name of Jacob, with whom I cannot venture to say I have yet part or lot. And, though my thirst is great, I am afraid it is not of a right or gracious character, and that my cry is uttered under the compulsion merely of natural distress.

“As for the other promise, about the blind—I am blind indeed; but then are we to suppose that God leads all blind people in this way? Is it not His own blind people in their Babylonish captivity that

He speaks to? It is not surely the blind Babylonians whom He promises to lead, but His poor blind Israel in Babylon. I fear I am as yet no better than a Babylonian, and have no reason to believe that He will bring and lead me. How then can I appropriate these good words with which in your hand you have come to-day?"

Ah, then, with sorrow I must restore the clusters to the basket, and take them all away with me. One—two—three—four—five! Let me shut down the cover on the basket, and sadly bid you farewell.

But stay, what is this which I find carefully attached to the under side of the cover, and which till now has escaped our observation? It is a label, with a sentence written on it, and very legibly too. Ah, the kind giver of the clusters must have pencilled the words and have affixed the label to the cover in the conservatory while his back was towards me! Listen! how does the sentence read?

"If, for any reason, they cannot receive the individual clusters, restore all of them to the basket, and then hand the basket itself, with all its contents, to any one who will accept of it."

You cannot, or will not, avail yourself of the separate clusters; but now, it seems, I am authorized to offer you the basket with all that is in it, and this without questioning or requirement or qualification of any kind. Do you feel incredulous at this intimation? Are you at a loss to understand

this portion of the parable? The explanation is not hard to find. Like the basket which holds the clusters of grapes, Christ Jesus Himself is the glorious receptacle or depositary that contains all the promises of God. He it is who, with all reverence on our part, is represented by the basket in which the green and purple trophies from the conservatory were laid up.

All the promises of God are in Him yea and amen, unto the glory of God by us. They were given into His hand before the foundation of the world, and shall we not say that, like sin-forfeited blessing, they have been bought with His precious blood? In Him they are for us again ratified and confirmed. In Him, as their depositary, they are without exception treasured up. They are administered by Him; and by Him, in their actual fulfilment, are made good in the souls of believers. So it is that all the promises of God in Him, exerting Divine power over our life and conduct, yield a revenue of "glory to God by us."

I admit there is considerable force in your not being able all at once to appropriate the promises of God. Indeed, I have some sympathy with you in your difficulties. There are persons who thoughtlessly grasp at promises, and at the consolations contained in them, but who are far from having warrant to do so. The promises are numerous and comprehensive. They are to be found hanging all

along the spacious conservatory of God's Word, but God's promises are made to God's people, and are given in Christ Jesus to those who believe.

We cannot say to the sinner in his rebellion, and while still in his unconverted condition, that all the promises of God are his. There is a great difference between the Divine promises and the Divine invitations. The promises are given to the church; the invitations are addressed to the world. It is true that God's word of invitation to sinners contains in it an implied assurance that, if the invitation be accepted, God will graciously receive the man. Moreover, there are promises given to Christ on the subject of the ingathering of sinners to God, and of deliverance by Him of prisoners who sit in darkness, which promises are eminently fitted to encourage the sinner to repent, and which are, in fact, made available for the conversion of sinners. But that is surely a different thing from saying that all the promises of God, with which He comforts His people, are at once directly to be laid hold of and appropriated by the sinner. How indeed could it be said, "Fear not, for I am with thee," to those who are still living as God's enemies by wicked works? How could it be affirmed, "Be not dismayed, for I am thy God," to those who are lying under condemnation, and are, in fact, still children of wrath, without God and without hope in the world? But whatever may be said with regard to the promises, viewed singly

or together, one thing is unmistakably true—that Christ Himself is held forth in God’s Word for the immediate acceptance of those who are utterly ruined and undone. A blessed truth this is, and let no man attempt to gainsay it.

Is it not written, “*The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost*”?¹ Lost! lost! Can any description be more terrible? If you are absolutely lost, is it possible for you to rectify your condition, to retrace your wandering steps, strike off the sentence of condemnation, or fulfil the law of God? You are certainly past all recovery if you are lost. But Christ Himself tells us that, passing by all besides, He has come for the express purpose of seeking and of saving that which is lost. Shall the lost then not feel warranted to grasp the hand of Him who is out in the waste in search of those who are ready to perish?

Again: “*This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief.*”² Jesus Christ came into the world; what to do? To save saints? No, to save sinners—not forgiven sinners, penitent sinners, believing sinners. It was to save sinners as such, and it is to them simply as sinners that His Gospel is directly addressed. They are welcome to come to Him. To them He makes offer of Himself to become their Saviour.

¹ Luke xix. 10.

² 1 Tim. i. 15.

And yet again: "*Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.*" Were not these words spoken to the miserable jailer of Philippi, who, a few minutes before, was on the point of plunging his sword into his heart, and of rushing with all his sin on him to his doom?

Further, was it not said by the apostle to a company of men whom he had never seen before, whose circumstances were unknown to him, and the greater part of whom, too, ultimately rejected his loving message, "*Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins: and by him, all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses*"? ¹

To you is preached, through this man, the forgiveness of sins. By Him all that believe are justified from all things. What richer exhibition could be given of Jesus as a Saviour of sinners? And may I not clench all I have said by rehearsing that wondrous invitation which God gives, when as it would seem standing in the midst of the world, He exclaims, "*Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is none else*"? ²

There can be no doubt that Christ Himself is offered to you whatever may be your condition in the sight of God, and that you are warranted now,

¹ Acts xiii. 38, 39.

² Isa. xlv. 22.

and on the spot, to appropriate Christ for your personal salvation.

I have heard it made a complaint by an anxious and dejected soul, "I know not what to do. I cannot get hold of a single promise." But may it not be that the sweet promises have, in such cases, been sought after instead of Christ Himself. Christ has been passed by or overlooked in your breathless pursuit of some pleasant promise, but it is a marvellous thing that Christ is more readily reached and laid hold of than His individual promises. With regard to the promise, you feel you have to settle the question beforehand whether you be among the persons entitled to appropriate it ; but it is otherwise with regard to Christ Himself. Here you need to answer no questions beforehand. You have no preliminary inquiries to make. It is enough that you are a sinner, that you are helpless, that you are lost. No qualifications are required. You are invited to come at once to Jesus. To as many as receive Him, to them He gives power to become the sons of God.

But the case does not so stand to-day that you have to make choice between receiving Christ and receiving His promises. It is most gloriously true that if you get hold of Christ you get hold of all His promises also, for all the promises of God are in Him. Without and apart from Christ you cannot appropriate promises. With Christ, and in

Him, you actually appropriate them all. Yea, all are yours—all the promises, and all the good things contained in them. All the treasures of Faith, Hope, and Love; all the provisions for a life of holiness—that holiness without which no man shall see the Lord;—all that is requisite to enable us to perform the duties of life, a blessed death, a heavenly rest, a bright resurrection, and eternal glory—all are stored up in Christ. Receive the Lord Jesus, and you have them all.

There are two classes of people before me at this moment, viz., the converted and the unconverted. To you who have been converted to God, I have a most blessed announcement to make, and it is that all the promises of God are yours. They belong to you as your precious and blood-bought heritage. The Bible is full of promises. If you are only skilful enough to discern them there, you will find promises scattered over all its pages. They will appear in most unexpected places and circumstances. There is no experience, however difficult, dark, distressful, or depressed, for which you may not find a promise well suited. Do not hesitate to appropriate them; make use of them, and enjoy them! The more you draw on them, the more abundantly will you be enriched, and the more will you please your bountiful Father in heaven.

But there is the other class of the unconverted that, I fear, is still to be found among us. Are

there not before me some who are still in their sins, walking according to the course of this world, and far from God? You are as yet unsaved, and the wrath of God, the Scripture says, is abiding on you. The promises of God cannot therefore be appropriated by you. Nor have I any encouragement to press on you the enjoyment of the promises of God's favour for your comfort and support. It is a most sad thing for me to stand before you with such wealth of blessing in my hand, and yet to be unable to press it on your acceptance, because you still persist in keeping aloof from the people of God. What is to be done? Shall I bid you farewell, with sorrow in my heart that I must leave you, unlike the others, unblessed? Thanks be to God, if I cannot offer these promises to you, I can offer what is as good as any promise; nay, even what is better than many promises. I can offer you CHRIST HIMSELF,—Christ the all-precious, Christ the all-sufficient, Christ the altogether lovely, Christ the righteousness of God provided for sinners; Christ, moreover, who is not only better than any individual promise, but who contains in Himself all the promises. Receive the Lord Jesus, and at the instant you not only will possess Him, but all the promises of God in Him. So then, wonderful to say, all the promises of God and Christ are pressed on the converted among us for their enjoyment, strengthening, and consolation; and Christ, with all

the promises of God in Him, is freely offered in the Gospel to those who are still unconverted among us. The chief of sinners is made welcome to receive the chiefest of all the blessings of God. May the Lord open the eyes of us all, that Christ may be known and believed in! Then shall Christ be ours, and, if Christ Himself, then all things shall be ours, whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come—all shall be ours, for we shall be Christ's, and Christ is God's. Amen.

XI.

THE BACKSLIDER.

Read as Scripture portions, Luke xv. 11-32; Hosea xiv. 1-8.

MY text is especially in Hosea xiv. 4: "I will heal their backsliding."

Let me introduce my subject by parable. We shall suppose ourselves translated to Eastern lands to share in a banquet, to which, along with many others, we have been invited by a nobleman of exalted rank, in celebration of his birthday. The princely entertainer descends to the hall of audience to give hearty greeting to the guests as they assemble. The spacious chamber is well-nigh filled. Glancing round, his Highness misses the presence of some who, on former occasions, had attended his festival, and on whom he reckoned to be with him now. The great man seems uneasy. He is unwilling that the festival should proceed in their absence. At length, calling to one of his attendants, he whispers to him to saddle his fleetest mule, and ride off in the direction of his loitering friends, and politely bid

them to make speed. By-and-by the messenger returns. He reports to his master that he had executed his order ; that he had come on the expected guests ; but, strange to say, they had evidently stopped on the way, and were returning leisurely to their homes ; that when he informed them that his Highness was waiting for them, and that the banquet was delayed on their account, one of them said that he had suddenly recollected an engagement which he found it necessary to keep, and that he could not possibly appear. Another said that he had recalled a slight or rebuke which his Highness had on some occasion given him, which he found now he could not brook, and that it would not be suitable for him to be a guest. A third said that he had been told that in some matter he had given his Highness serious offence, and that he feared his presence to-day would be unwelcome. "And nothing," adds the messenger, "that I could say would persuade them to turn with me."

In this discourse it will be my object to speak to the case of those persons, once the professed friends of the Great Entertainer, whose presence at the banquet there was occasion to expect, but who, for reasons of their own, have stopped short, and decline to appear. In plain terms, I wish to address that class of persons common among ourselves, and prominently pointed at in this fourteenth chapter of Hosea—that of *Backsliders*.

Let us notice :

I. *The Sin of Backsliding.*—Backsliding in its simple meaning implies a falling away from previous attainment in spiritual things. I shall at present pay special regard to the backsliding of those who have professed to be Christians. The backslider is the prodigal who, having been welcomed home, goes astray for the second time. Backsliding is insidious, as it is pernicious. It reminds us of the disease called creeping paralysis, which gradually deprives the limbs of the power of motion and of sensibility. Backsliders are prone to imagine that sin in them has palliations which exist not in the case of others. They think that what would be reprehensible in many, with them admits of excuse; that their religious attainments and services will excuse or extenuate worldly compliances on their part. This is a perilous mistake. Sin in every form, in all circumstances, and in all persons, is a heinous offence. Like cancer on the cheek of beauty, it is at all times malignant and revolting. Sin, instead of parting with any of its hatefulness, when committed by the man of religious experience who has rendered services to the Gospel, becomes vastly more aggravated in character and injurious in its example. Were there any sin which could try the virtue of the blood of Christ to wipe out stain, it would be that of backsliding. Other men sin against conscience and God’s revealed law; but the backslider, if a Christian, sins in addition

against light and love, against the rich and saving grace of God. To illustrate the banefulness of backsliding, let me contrast the sin of the prodigal in leaving his father's house for the first time with that of his departure for the second time. "Give me the portion of goods that falleth to me," was the unfilial and ungracious request which fell on his father's ear from the lips of the thoughtless youth. His object secured, the young man, instead of taking a farm in the neighbourhood, disregarding the claims of home and his father's age, as well as the ordinances of grace and the privileges of Israel, and bent on pleasure and selfish gratification, packed up his possessions, left his native valley, and betook him to some one of the great cities among the heathen. There he at once, when beyond his father's eye, plunged into the dissipations that stood in readiness to ensnare him. Oh, how like is this to the conduct of youths who, weary of the restraints and monotones of home, repair to some distant city, like London or Paris, give themselves up to amusements, and are soon to be seen swirling round in the vortex of gambling, drunkenness, profligacy, and riot, till every memory of loving mother and godly father, of Bible and Sabbath, seems utterly gone! Such is a faint picture of the sinner on his first departure. Let us now suppose him brought to repentance, and coming home at last, broken, penniless, sickly, almost a wreck. Let us imagine him received, as we know

he was, by his tender-hearted father, and reinstated in all his former privileges, honours, and comforts; every inmate having been charged on no account to utter a word of reproach or of upbraiding for the past. I say, let us suppose all this to have taken place, and then that on some morning it should be found that he did not appear at the family meal, and that, on inquiry, one of the domestics gave information that the young man had been seen at sunrise that day with a large package at the garden gate, and when questioned had said, “He could not stand any longer the intolerable dulness of the house; that a young fellow like himself could not live there; that he did not care if he never saw the place again; that this time he was off for good and all, and no mistake!” Ah! would not the blow given to the father’s heart be more dreadful now than before? Would not the heartlessness and ingratitude of the youth pierce the old man’s bosom like a knife? If the prodigal’s first departure called forth our censure, his flight and conduct now must rouse our indignation and disgust. Well, the backslider’s sin is stamped with the guilt of this second departure from the father’s house.

II. *The Chastisement of Backsliding.*—Regarding the chastisement of backsliding, I have to say that, if the backslider be not hereafter cast into the lake of fire, God will here on earth cast liquid fire into the heart of the backslider.

(1) *The Chastisement inevitable.*—The chastisement of the backslider is inevitable. Of other men than Christians we may say that, while these may pass out of this world to their account without being plagued and without bonds in their death, they will be reckoned with in another world.¹ The backsliding Christian, on the other hand, may lay his account with chastisement in this life. When the prodigal left his home for the first time, the world with its bright hues and gilded fascinations lured him on. He did not awake to conscious bitterness till conscience was roused amid the miseries of famine. But it is otherwise when the prodigal forsakes his father's house for the second time. Now he carries in him a sting which will inflict pain on him every step he takes further from home, and which will poison every pleasure. The world can never be to him what once it was. The gnawings of conscience take the relish out of all enjoyments; nay more, even when he is brought anew to concern, and bethinks himself to return, every step of the way back will be attended with suffering. Nay, should his backsliding be forgiven, the shooting pangs of remorse will probably vex him till his dying day.

(2) *The Chastisement severe.*—We have only to glance at Scripture to learn, backslider, what your chastisement may be. Look at Noah, obliged to pronounce a prophetic curse on his own son and

¹ Psalm lxxiii. 5, 17-20.

on his descendants, which would not have fallen from his lips but for his own inexcusable sin. Think of Lot, that righteous man, left in his sin to disappear from the page of inspiration, amid the exhalations of a filthy den. Think of Jacob, the deceiver of his father, the defrauder of his brother, driven from his home for twenty years, cruelly deceived and wounded by his own sons, worn down with lifelong trials, a broken man. Think of Moses, than whom, till Christ came, there arose no greater, after eighty years' endurance of the reproach of Christ, and when he had lived one hundred and nineteen years, kept at last out of Canaan, and made to expire on Nebo's top, with no human hand to close his eyes, and all for *one* public sin. Think of Samson, with his glorious eyes gouged out, his mighty hands grinding in a prison-house, like those of a female slave, until he lies prostrate in death, overwhelmed with the bloody rubbish of Dagon's temple. Think of backsliding David, the man after God's own heart, with the sword reeking with the hot blood of his own house till his dying day. Think of Solomon, spared for his father's sake, yet visited with the awful sentence that his sin would break up his splendid kingdom after his death, and bring a flood of sorrow on his foolish and unhappy son. Think of Hezekiah, his one day's indulgence in vainglory followed by the prophetic threatenings that all that was in his

palace, persons and things, should, when he was in his grave, be carried captive to Babylon. Think of Jonah, carried down in the maw of a sea-monster to the green weeds of the deep. Think of Peter, great as afterwards he was, yet with the story of his fall indelibly engraved in full detail by four separate writers, and published from century to century, as by four trumpets, whose blast reaches every land. Think of the overthrow of the six hundred thousand men, and as many women, who, after their triumphant exodus from Egypt, yet for their backsliding perished in the wilderness. Think of Israel and Judah, not merely swept off in bondage to Babylon for seventy years, but scattered by fiery judgment over the face of the earth for the last eighteen hundred years. These are some of the Bible lessons as to the chastisement of backsliding.

(3) *The Character of the Chastisement.* — The character of the chastisement usually corresponds with that of the backsliding, though indeed we cannot reckon on this. However, if the backsliding be public, the chastisement will probably be open also. If the backsliding be secret, as is often the case, the chastisement will probably be secret too, though, as we see in the case of David, it may be far otherwise. Let it not be thought by any man that the secrecy of the chastisement will deprive the chastisement of its severity. God has methods

of wounding to the quick, of piercing the bosom in its keenest sensibilities, little thought of till the chastisement is actually experienced. A man may live on without anything finding its way to a tell-tale world. He may continue successful in business, fortunate in enterprise, his family blooming around him. He may be regarded by the community as peculiarly prosperous, and yet all the while the liquid fire may almost unremittingly be trickling in on his bosom. The bosom may be scorched with agony, the soul be sinking under withering blight; his affections may become like the grey ashes on his cold hearth; a sense of his degradation, his baseness, his corruption, the shadow of a dark future, may haunt him for twenty years, making life at times well-nigh insupportable;

“His mood was often like a fiend, and rose
And drove him into wastes and solitudes
For agony, who was yet a living soul.”¹

(4) *The Instruments of Chastisement.*—There is, moreover, usually a congruity between the instruments of chastisement and the sin which occasions the chastisement. Indeed, the chastisement is frequently inflicted through means of the sin itself. Israel’s false stay it is which smites him.² “Thine own wickedness shall correct thee, and thy backslidings shall reprove thee: know, therefore, and see,

¹ Tennyson, “Idyls of the King—Elaine.”

² Isa. x. 20.

that it is an evil thing and bitter, that thou hast forsaken the LORD thy God, and that my fear is not in thee, saith the Lord GOD of hosts.”¹ “Ephraim shall say, What have I to do any more with idols?”² God is wont to employ the idols of a man’s own heart as the scourge of chastisement. What is an idol? An idol is any object that holds Christ’s place in the heart, and commands the affections. An idol is like the yawning grave: it is never satisfied. An idol must be destroyed, or it will destroy. So long as any object remains under our control, it can scarcely be called an idol; but when, instead of our controlling it, it controls us; when, holding our affections in its grasp, it drags us after it—then the object, whatever it be, becomes an idol, whose sway over us is wholly pernicious. Shall we venture to describe the idolater at his devotions?

Day by day he comes with his offering, and lays it at his idol’s feet. At first he approaches the idol daintily, with sweet compliments and many smiles. He brings his proffers of service, his protestations, resolutions, promises, and abundance of fair words. The idol accepts all, but instantly demands more and better gifts. Then the votary returns, and brings with him his time, his strength, his thought, his mind, his business, his money, his studies, his sleep, the bloom of his life, his health. The idol receives all, but grimly asks for more.

¹ Jer. ii. 19.² Hos. xiv. 8.

Then the poor man returns, carrying with him, though with starting eyes, the comforts of his home, the peace of his loving wife—ah! and what is that? her bleeding breast itself; the light from the eyes of his pretty children, their mirth and youthful glee, their daily bread, the bed they sleep on, their education, their morality, their respectability, their prosperity in life, and the broken hearts of all his relations! Still the frowning idol imperiously asks for more. And then the miserable man will be seen staggering in, bearing with him his honour, his outraged conscience, his good name, all his recollections of his Christian mother's love, his Sabbaths, his seasons of secret prayer, his Bible, his eternal hope, his immortal soul. If the grace of God did not sweep down and interpose, and were it in itself possible, he would, in the frenzy of his infatuation, make an offering to his idol of Christ Himself! And all to what? To an object perhaps as destitute of comeliness as the rude block adored by the Polynesian of the Pacific or the Indian Brahmin! The object may be some degrading lust, that exerts its mysterious power through the depraved sensibilities of the worshipper's own heart. Oh, the anguish that is endured when matters come to such a pass as this! And what return does the idol make for all these sacrifices? Does it give any token of contentment? Not at all. On the contrary, it frowns, it threatens,

it stamps, it lifts its hand and smites, it raises its foot and kicks, it opens its mouth and spits on its votary. It will torture him with secret pangs, and possibly conclude by handing over its miserable victim to some other idol, as cruel and insatiable as itself.

Some of you may consider this picture to be in its outlines overdrawn ; but I feel very sure that there are some among my hearers whose own history, or that of some of their relatives, I have with some accuracy sketched. There are perhaps to-day no such unhappy men amongst us as backsliders. Oh, remember how much of Scripture is occupied with the subject of backsliding ! Many of the Psalms, a large part of Isaiah, the books of Jeremiah and Lamentations, Hosea, and not a few of the shorter prophets, have backsliding as the burden of their prophecy. Well may Ephraim exclaim, "What have I to do any more with idols ?"

III. *The Healing of Backsliding.*—On this branch of the subject I may say, backsliding is an evil which is hard to cure, but God is the healer of backsliding.

(1) *Backsliding is an evil which is hard to cure.*—It is difficult to persuade the backslider, when conscience has been awakened, that there is possibility for him to find mercy. "My day is passed," he is tempted to say. "I have shut myself out of all the promises.¹ I have tasted of the good word of God, and have deliberately forsaken Christ. I am joined

¹ See Bunyan's Interpreter's House, "Pilgrim's Progress."

to my idols. I have chosen the world. I have given myself up to my lusts. I have crucified the Lord afresh. I have gone back, like the sow, to her wallowing in the mire. I shall never see the promised land. My carcase must fall in the wilderness. I have played with temptation till it caught me, and hurried me on headlong with ungovernable passion. I have beckoned to the devil, and he has come to me ; and now I am given over to despair. Nothing arouses me ; nothing affects me. I cannot believe ; I cannot repent. My case is without hope. I am a castaway !" Ah, these are terrible words ! It is in vain that we urge on the unhappy man that the invitations of the Gospel are world-wide, and that they include him as well as others ; that the blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanseth us from all sin. The backslider shakes his head. "It is too late, too late for me to think of returning ;" and then he retires muttering something about the sin against the Holy Ghost, which hath never forgiveness, and about those who, falling away, cannot be renewed unto repentance. We do not, however, desist from our dealings with the backslider. On some favourable opportunity we approach him again, and assure him that the rich messages of the Gospel are applicable to his case, that whosoever will, may take the water of life freely. But the backslider is ready with his objection. "Were I to think of turning to God now," he will perhaps say, "what

reason should I have for believing that my faith or my repentance would be of the right character? All that you have told me, and a great deal more, I know, and have known for years. I am no stranger to the doctrines or words of the Bible. I have had my religious experiences, like your own; perhaps they may even have surpassed yours. I thought at one time that I had believed and was a Christian. I had, as I supposed, the peace of the Gospel, and I spoke of my assurance of salvation. What you have told me I have often pressed on the acceptance of others. I even had the idea I was useful. Yet, you see, how it is with me to-day. What value can I attach to the faith I then exercised, to the repentance I then underwent, to the experience I then enjoyed? I have preached to others, and am myself a castaway. Have I not been all along the victim of delusion? How shall I be assured that the faith and love of to-day would not prove as vain in their nature as those in days gone by appear to have been?" The man feels that he is hopelessly bewildered. He is entangled in a net, from which he cannot set himself free. It is part of the backslider's chastisement to be left in the mazes of uncertainty. He cannot place confidence in the exercising of his own faculties. Levity of mind, unholy familiarity with sacred things, and conformity to the world, conduct religious professors into a labyrinth of doubt.

(2) But though backsliding be an evil that is hard to cure, *God is the healer of backsliding.* Let me here resume the little parable with which my address opened. Our latest notice of the noble entertainer was at the moment when he had received information that some of his expected guests had turned back while on their way, and were retracing their steps homewards.

“Bring me my tablets!” exclaims the nobleman; and, sitting down, he pens a very few words, which done, he folds the letter, and, having carefully addressed it, he gives it to his attendant, saying, “Go again. Slack not thy riding; make up with all speed to the man whose name is on the back of this letter. Put the letter in his hand. See that he opens it; and wait till it is read.”

My backsliding brother, I am that messenger who has been sent out post-haste in quest of you. I have made up to you on the highway, and in the name of my Great Master I cry to you, “Halt! Stop! What-ho!” The backslider turns about to see who calls. “Yes; I hold in my hand a letter addressed to yourself. Is not this your name inscribed on it? I was charged to put it into your own hand.” The man takes the letter. He looks at the address. He sees it is for himself. The seal is without doubt that of the Great Summoner to the banquet. He opens and reads aloud. Hush! my friends. If you remain very still, perhaps the

contents of this singular epistle may reach your ear. It is dated from Hosea xiv. 1. "O Israel,"—that is the backslider's own name,—“O Israel, return unto the LORD thy God; for thou hast fallen by thine iniquity.” My unhappy brother, however far gone you may be, these words are unmistakably addressed to yourself. I may not be able to answer your difficulties and objections, but these words, like a sharp sword, cut through them all. God has sent you the message. The voice of God did not more distinctly proclaim the ten commandments from Sinai than it now warns, invites, and commands you to return. We have seen that it is hard to prevail with a backslider. Perhaps you reply, “I have carefully searched the four Gospels. I have examined their beautiful parables; but I have not been able to find one that is applicable to my case. I have pondered the parable in the fifteenth of Luke; but, though I am touched by the welcome given there to the prodigal, I find nothing in that, or in any other parable of Jesus, to show that there would be a welcome for me; for, you see, I am the prodigal who has gone away from the Father's house for the *second time*.” I think, my doubting friend, that you are mistaken about none of the parables in the four Gospels pointing to a case like your own. I believe I could find such a parable; but will not a Bible parable, taken elsewhere than from the four Gospels, do equally well? Now I

think I may engage to point out to you a parable in which as rich a welcome is extended to the prodigal on his return for the second time as at the first. Nay, I could almost promise to show you that the welcome for the second time is the more wonderful of the two.

Let us glance at the welcome awarded to the prodigal returning for the first time, as described in the fifteenth of Luke.

The young man is in the far country, in the height of mirth and gaiety. Life is a perpetual holiday amid gambling, revelling, musicians, and dancers. But sunshine cannot always last. The day overcasts. Money runs short. The purse threatens to become empty. Meanwhile, one of those famines common in these countries, occurs. Everything rises in price. His gay friends, when applied to for temporary help, turn coldly away. The world of fashion has little scruple in throwing a penniless youth aside. Rather than run further into debt, or starve, the young man makes up his mind to do something for his own subsistence. He was not so base as some idlers. He has been brought up on his father's farm. He will go and hire himself to one of the proprietors in the neighbourhood. But the times are bad. People are dismissing those in their employ. There is little in the applicant's appearance to commend him for his work. The poor youth, baffled in his attempt, is about to retire,

when the citizen, touched by his look, and aware that he has known better days, says, "My swineherd left me a few days ago. If you think you could take his place, you may go into the field." It is a humiliation for a fine gentleman to perform a menial's service; but for a Jew to become the herdsman of a dog-like Gentile—above all, for an Israelite to have no other work to do than to feed a Gentile's unclean and law-forbidden swine—was degradation beyond imagination! See to what depths of shame will sin drag us down! The ingratitude of friends has stung him; gaunt hunger has driven him to despair. He accepts the dismal charge, and, setting out for the fields, he watches the herd,—thus fleeing from the famine, but unable to flee from himself. Even now the gnawings of appetite pursue him, and he is glad to share with his unclean herd the husks they eat. Yonder he sits under the shadow of the broad locust-tree, the picture of dejection. Hark! he speaks. "What is to become of me? I am as one lost. No one cares for me, nor would pay heed if I were found dead in yonder ditch to-morrow. To what a pass has my stupid folly brought me! Why did I ever leave my father's house?" Then his thoughts take wing, and all the memories of his early happy days rise before him. "The very servants," he murmurs to himself, "have enough and to spare, while I perish with hunger. Oh, could I but think of going home again!" And then

the poor youth, to beguile the time, falls into a reverie, and thinks what he might say if ever he returned to his father. No sooner do the words pass through his mind than the thought strikes him that he will go home, and that he will say these very words: "I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants." Starting to his feet, he takes his last look of the herd, and, repairing to his employer, thanks him, but says that he has come to resign his post. "What! going away?" says his master. "Yes, I mean to return to my own people." And now, with empty purse, raiment soiled and ragged, haggard in look, and with a sinking heart, he travels homewards on foot.

Let us now turn to the young man's early home. His father has never ceased thinking of his long-lost son. He is resting on the flat housetop, when a figure in the distance comes in sight. His heart begins to beat. "Impossible!" he says to himself; "it cannot be he." He puts his hand over his eyes, to shade them in the sunshine. "Yet it is like him. Nay, now there can be no mistake. It is my poor lost boy. It is himself." Then, instantly descending, he issues from the gate. The servants, being at a loss to explain their old master's excitement, follow him. "But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and

ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him." And now the son proceeds to sob out the well-chosen and carefully prepared words he had put together under the locust-tree. "Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son."¹ He was about to add the rest, but the father would not give him time; for, turning to the servants who had now come up, he said to one and to another in haste, "Open my wardrobe, and bring forth the finest piece of raiment, the best robe, and put it on him. He cannot enter my house in these rags. And you, fetch the ring for his finger, which you will find in my cabinet; and shoes for his feet. And you, drive home from the field the fatted calf and kill it. Send round to our neighbours, and tell them we shall expect them all to eat with us to-night, and share with us in our joy, 'For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.'" Such is the story of the prodigal's first return. Now for that of his return for the second time. He is sitting, as before, under the tree; but his condition is ten times sadder now. The ungrateful wanderer is lost in speechless dejection. There is no longer any attempt on his part to frame words to be used, should he think of returning. One dreadful effect of backsliding is that power to utter prayer is taken from the lips. The backslider cannot look God in

¹ The words in verses 18 and 21 are identical in the original.

the face. His backsliding strikes him down. Are there not some before me whose incapacity to pray is the most dismal memorial of their sin? Let us turn again to the prodigal's father in the pleasant valley. He is again on the house-top. Often has he wistfully looked in the direction from which the wanderer previously came back. "Will he ever come home? Will he ever come home?" he says to himself. "If he does, it will be with oppressive shame. He will be speechless with confusion. Yet it would not be expedient that I should receive him without clear acknowledgment on his part of his inexcusable conduct. He must ask my forgiveness." And then the injured father begins to muse on what would be the suitable "words" for the sinning youth to employ were he to return; and, having done so, he writes the expressions down. "Who knows what may happen," he says; "I will keep the writing with me till a future day."

Don't interrupt me, my friends! You demur, you exclaim, "That is not the Scripture parable you promised to show us, but one drawn from your own fancy." Nay, brethren, I call you to the Scripture. My part of the parable is mere drapery. The substance of the parable is to be found in the Old Testament, and in this fourteenth chapter of Hosea. See you not here the Father yearning over the prodigal for the second time? Do we not hear His cry, 'O Israel, return unto the LORD thy God;

for thou hast fallen by thine iniquity"? And what do we find in the two verses that follow? Have we not there the very "WORDS" which the Father wrote down on the house-top, the "words" which His unhappy son might use should he seek his Father's house again? Shall I read these words to you,—the prayer which the Father Himself has prepared for the prodigal to repeat? "Take with you words,"—and these are the words to be taken—"Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously: so will we render the calves of our lips. Asshur shall not save us; we will not ride upon horses; neither will we say any more to the work of our hands, Ye are our gods: for in thee the fatherless findeth mercy."

In the New Testament parable it was the prodigal who prepared the "words" for his father; but in the Old Testament parable it is, on the contrary, the Father who prepares the "words" for the prodigal. Such are the two parables. Shall we be witnesses now of the prodigal's return for the second time, blending at the same time in the parable the human with the Divine?

The young man, now older somewhat, appears in the valley as before. The father is folding him to his heart; but, as he anticipated, his son is dumb. Not a sound escapes his closed lips. Confusion has deprived him of utterance. But hark! the father's voice. "My son, thou art sorry, art thou not, for what thou hast done? Let me hear that thou art

grieved and penitent for thine evil and unnatural conduct. Speak, and I shall at once have thee in the house again.” But the young man is silent. His tongue cleaves to the roof of his mouth. “Thou art ashamed to speak. Ah! I thought as much. Well then, repeat after me what I say.” And then, as a mother at eventide would teach her little child to fold the hands and repeat a prayer after her before the little one lies down to sleep, the father bids the prodigal take the “words” which he supplies to him and say them after him. “Take away all iniquity,” “*Take away all iniquity,*” “and receive us graciously,” “*and receive us graciously:*” “so will we render the calves of our lips,” “*so will we render the calves of our lips.*” “Asshur shall not save us; we will not ride upon horses,” “*Asshur shall not save us; we will not ride upon horses;*” “neither will we say any more to the work of our hands, Ye are our gods,” “*neither will we say any more to the work of our hands, Ye are our gods:*” “for in thee the fatherless findeth mercy,” “*for in thee—the fatherless—findeth—mercy.*”

Have I not made good my promise? Have I not shown you one element of grace in the Old Testament parable which we did not find in the New?

Still, perhaps you complain there is something lacking in the prodigal's second reception. “Where,” you ask, “are the robe, the ring, the shoes, the fatted calf, the music, and making merry?” Be not

hasty in drawing unfavourable comparisons. Tokens of rejoicing enough are there, when the backslider comes home. Then, as before, may be heard the tinkling of the high priest's golden bells, the echoes of the silver trump of jubilee, the music of the harp, to greet the twice-prodigal's return. Do you ask for a token like the best robe? Have we not such in the promise, "I will be as the dew unto Israel: he shall grow as the lily, and cast forth his roots as Lebanon"? God Himself will descend, as the quickening dew, on the wasted and withered backslider; and forthwith he shall grow as the lily, be fair as the lily, fresh as the lily, fragrant as the lily. Nay, more, he shall be as the cedar in Lebanon,—strong as the cedar, stately as the cedar, steadfast as the cedar. Do you ask for a token like the ring, the shoes, the fatted calf? Have we not such a one in the promise, "His branches shall spread, and his beauty shall be as the olive-tree, and his smell as Lebanon"? Do you ask for a token like the music and the joyous company? Have you not such a one in the promise, "They that dwell under his shadow shall return; they shall revive as the corn, and grow as the vine: the scent thereof shall be as the wine of Lebanon"? God is able to make the recovered backslider useful to the Church, as in the instances of David and Peter, the latter of whom was made a greater blessing after his fall than ever before. Ah! what voice is that which rises softly

from hearts in the congregation, touched by the rich and sovereign grace of God? Hush! that all may hear it. "What hath Ephraim to do any more with idols?" Come then, brethren, come all, "Let us return unto the Lord: for he hath torn, and he will heal us." May that Holy Spirit, whose office it is to reveal Christ to the soul, and whose drawing to Jesus is indispensable to every one, call home every backslider among us to-day, and join all to the Lord in a perpetual covenant that shall not be forgotten!

The Church of Christ needs you, backsliders. She is weak so long as you stay away. The banquet of the Great Entertainer waits for you to appear. The Lord's host in the sandy wilderness halts in its march, till you bethink you of your sin and folly in tarrying behind, and till you join the ranks of the true Israel. Your coming up would cheer the heart of God's people, and make them stronger than before. Your appearance would act on the weak and desponding, like the reinforcements approaching the gates of the beleaguered fortress. Indeed, it will be so. Courage, then! May God with His trumpet-call awake you from your infatuated slumber and call you in! Mighty is the saving arm of the Lord Jesus. Mighty is His love. Amen.

XII.

A LECTURE.

*"WHAT CHRISTIANITY OWES TO THE JEWS."*¹

I APPEAR before you as a stranger, to deliver an address on a subject which is dear to many among us, I refer to the obligation under which Christianity lies to the Jews.

Though a Gentile, I desire to enter into the feelings of that great lover of his people who so touchingly describes them as those "Who are Israelites; to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises; whose are the fathers, and of whom, as concerning the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen."² I regret that from inability to speak your language, I am under the necessity of employing an interpreter; but in this I am following the example of Joseph in Egypt, when conversing with his brethren.

¹ As delivered before Jewish audiences in various parts of the world.

² Rom. ix. 4, 5.

Of course I must be allowed to speak as a Christian, and I may express views in which all who hear me may not coincide; but my object is to promote good-feeling between Christians and Jews, and it will be my endeavour to say nothing that will wound the feelings of any one.

Some years ago, I happened to visit Gibraltar. Since the Jews were driven out from Spain, at the end of the fifteenth century, few Jews are to be found in that country; but as Gibraltar came into the possession of another nation many Jews congregated there. On the occasion referred to, accompanied by a friend, I was on my way early in the morning to the harbour, with the intention of proceeding to Malaga by a steamer advertised to sail that day. The vessel did not keep her appointment, and I, somewhat vexed, for I knew I would be detained a week, was returning to the city, when we met two gentlemen, whom I found to be Jews; one was proprietor of a large goods store, and the other was the Jewish schoolmaster at Gibraltar.

We all walked back to the town together; my friend went into the store to converse with its proprietor, while I, along with the schoolmaster, stood in the middle of the street.

Breaking silence, I asked him whether he had read the printed letter which the lady had left at the door of many Israelites in Gibraltar. In

explanation of my question, I may mention that the lady was the widow of a Scottish gentleman well known to me, and who was perhaps the most enthusiastic friend of the Jews in Scotland at the time. He had prepared a letter, which was issued with much approbation, to be sent to Israel in various countries. The gentleman had died, and the letter had remained untouched for many years, and no doubt would soon have been forgotten. The lady, who almost equalled her husband in zeal for Israel, formed the resolution of getting the letter translated into different languages, and of going personally to various countries to distribute her dead husband's earnest appeal. She came to Spain when I was there, and indeed I accompanied her to Gibraltar.

"Have you read the letter?" I asked. He admitted having done so.

"What do you think of it?"

"Oh, it was very good."

"She was a wonderful lady who left the letter."

"Yes?"

"I think that lady was greater than the Queen of Sheba."

"How so?" said he.

"For this reason,—the Queen of Sheba came from the uttermost parts of the earth to obtain some benefit for herself, and to hear the wisdom of Solomon; but this lady has come from the uttermost parts of the earth for the sake of

others, to impart benefit to you, and others like yourself."

"H'm."

Taking courage, I said, "I am a son of Abraham."

"You?"

"Yes, and I refuse to be disowned by you. All my hope for time and eternity is founded on the covenant made with Abraham."

"Are you a Jew?" he said softly.

"No; but you know it is written that in Abraham and in his seed all the families of the earth are to be blessed, and I come into his family as one who believes in the promise made to him; so I am a son of Abraham."

To this he did not reply.

Happening to have a Bible in my hand, I said, "Do you see this book? If you divide it exactly into four equal parts, you and I agree that three of these are the inspired word of God. It is only about this fourth part that we differ."

"Ah," he replied, "but then you interpret the three parts by the one part."

"Well," I answered, "but I interpret the one part by the three, so you see we have a good deal in common."

He now thought that it was his turn to put a question to me. "I would like to ask you one thing," he said.

"What is it?"

"What do you think is the meaning of the prophet's words, 'The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former'?"¹

"Oh," I replied, "I should like much to know what your opinion of it is."

"No, no, no; I wish to know what you think of it."

"Oh, my interpretation is not at present important to know. I should like to have your mind about it."

"No, no; let me hear what you think."

"Very well," I said; "but it is not likely that my interpretation will satisfy you."

"Oh, go on."

"Well then, the latter house of which Haggai speaks is the temple built by Zerubbabel—the second temple—and the former house is the temple of King Solomon."

"Just so," he said.

"Now the glory of the former house was exceedingly great, and it had certain remarkable characteristics of which the latter house was destitute. For one thing, it possessed the cloud of Divine glory which rested between the cherubim, which the latter house never had."

"No," he interjected, with some eagerness; "nor had it the Urim and Thummim!"

"No," I continued; "nor had it the ark, nor the mercy-seat, nor the tables of the covenant written

¹ Hag. ii. 9.

with the finger of God, nor the golden pot that had manna, nor Aaron's rod that budded."

"True," he said, and looked at me with inquiring eye.

"Well then," I asked, "how could it be affirmed that the glory of the latter house exceeded the glory of the former house, when the latter house was devoid of all these distinguishing tokens?"

"Well, how do you explain it?"

I resumed: "The distinguishing glory of the first house was this, that God came to it, dwelling in a cloud; but the greater glory of the latter house consisted in this, that to it the Lord came, dwelling in the flesh. It was a greater glory for the latter house for the Lord to come to it, dwelling in the flesh, than it was for the former house for the Lord to come to it, dwelling in the cloud."

This interpretation staggered my friend for the moment, and he did not know how to meet it. After a moment's hesitation, he said, "Oh, but you cannot prove that."

"Well," I replied, "I do not know, but I think I can. You see in the same passage it is said, 'I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come: and I will fill this house with glory, saith the LORD of hosts. . . . The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former, . . . and in this place will I give peace;' and another prophet, speaking of the latter house, says, 'Behold, I will send

my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me : and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in : behold, he shall come, saith the LORD of hosts.'¹ Now, we never hear of the Lord coming suddenly to the latter house in any way, unless it be, as we Christians believe, by His coming in the flesh."

To this, which I knew could not be satisfactory to my Jewish friend, he made no reply. Let me remind you that we were standing in the open street ; my friend was a firmly built man, with broad shoulders, and with bushy brown whiskers encircling his honest face. He was possessed of very long and strong arms, and stood for the instant looking at me ; then raising his arms, so that they almost assumed a threatening aspect, he all at once threw them round my neck, drew me towards him, pressed me to his breast, and *kissed me on both cheeks !*

Certainly this appeared to me—a Scotchman, and quite unaccustomed to such demonstrations, as in my country, men never kiss each other—the most extraordinary termination of an argument of which I had ever heard.

My companion, the minister, who had been in the store with the other Jew, now reappeared, and I retired with him, wondering as I walked along the street at what had passed.

¹ Mal. iii. 1.

A week elapsed, and the day for the ship to sail to Malaga arrived. Again my ministerial friend and I were, at an early hour, on the way to the harbour. Just at the spot where I had come upon the two Jewish gentlemen the week before, we found them standing together, and we exchanged friendly greeting.

"Good-bye," I said to the schoolmaster, with whom I had had the conversation,—*"Good-bye. I'm going away to Malaga now, and no mistake; the ship is sure to sail to-day;"* and, taking him by the hand, I bid him heartily farewell. But I was not going to allow the Christian to be outdone by the Jew, so, grasping him firmly by the hand, I drew him towards me, and, throwing my arms round his neck, pressed him to my heart, and kissed him on both cheeks, just as he had done to me; and I have often thought since that if we, Christians and Jews, could, in our intercourse with each other, proceed a little more on this kissing system, we should probably be able to understand one another better, and more readily find our way to each others' hearts, than is often the case.

I.

Let us now consider what Christianity owes to the Jews. Our limits will admit of only a brief enumeration of the benefits.

I. The Jews for four thousand years were the

repositories of the entire revelation which God gave to man. Of that revelation they were the appointed custodiers, holding it in trust for the future enrichment of the human race.

2. All the promises of God, which, like a mighty stream, have flowed down for the healing and blessing of the world through all the ages preceding the Christian era, were either given to the Jews, or were committed to the care of the Jews.

3. The great patriarchs with whom the covenant of grace was successively established, under which we are still blessed,—those fathers whose names God has so wondrously connected with His own, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob,—were Jews.

4. The unique lawgiver, with whose name God's moral law is indissolubly connected,—who received the ten commandments delivered from Sinai, and who deposited them, when twice written by the Divine hand on tables of stone, in the Ark of the Covenant, beneath the cherubim and the Divine glory,—was a Jew.

5. That great ritual economy set up at Horeb, which exhibited in pictures symbolical, faultless, and Divine all that is precious in redemption, and from which we obtain our clearest ideas of some of the vital truths of Christianity, was given exclusively to Israel.

6. That king, David the son of Jesse, whose inspired songs are still the Church's treasury of

spiritual experience,—those songs which are read and sung by so many every day, and are prized and pondered in the remotest regions of the globe at this hour,—was a Jew. It is affecting to think that, after the lapse of three thousand years, these psalms should be sung universally, even in the distant and romantic Highlands of my native land; and that such psalms as the twenty-third, the one hundredth, the one hundred and third, and the one hundred and twenty-first should be on the lips of our young children.

7. That other king, the wisest of men, whose proverbial philosophy has been accepted by mankind throughout the world, and been diffused for the guidance of kings and communities, of merchants, householders, parents, men, women, and children,—was a Jew.

8. All the prophets from Jacob downwards, raised up successively from age to age to be witnesses for God, who continued till Old Testament prophecy ceased, and who gave us those incomparable seventeen books, from Isaiah to Malachi, which bear their names, and which may be regarded as so many majestic halls in which God laid out His prophetic truth in splendour, surpassing all to be found in the classic stores of antiquity,—these all were Jews.

9. That sublime portion of the evidence for the truth of Christianity—I mean the irrefragable evi-

dence of prophecy—is found exclusively in the ancient writings of the Jews.

10. But more than this, three of the four evangelists—Matthew, Mark, and John—from whom we derive so much of our acquaintance with Christ, were Jews.

11. The twelve apostles of our Lord, by whom the world has been evangelized, and whose names are graven on the foundation of the walls of the New Jerusalem, were Jews.

12. The seventy disciples whom the Lord sent before His face, while on earth, were Jews.

13. The great apostle of the Gentiles, who did more than all others to diffuse the Gospel among the nations, whose writings constitute the greater portion of the New Testament and are sounding over all the earth at this hour, and who has done so much to change the condition of the world,—was a Jew.

14. The three thousand converted at Pentecost, who formed the first Christian Church, were all Jews.

15. Those simple missionaries who, being scattered abroad from Jerusalem by persecution, first carried the tidings of the new life through Judea, Samaria, and Galilee,—were Jews.

16. The evangelist who was the means, through the chamberlain of Queen Candace, of sending the Gospel to the Soudan, thence to find its way to the interior of Africa,—was a Jew.

17. The Gospel was planted in Antioch, the Queen of the East, by Jews.

18. It was carried to Asia Minor and Ephesus by Jews.

19. It was by a Jew that the Church of Christ was formed in Philippi in Macedonia, in Thessalonica, Athens, Corinth, whence Christianity spread throughout all Europe. Nay, the Gospel was carried to Rome itself by Jews.

20. Nor must we omit to mention, as the most notable fact of all, that the Founder of Christianity Himself, with whom the eternal hope of so many amongst us is bound up, as regards His human nature, was a Jew.

21. I cannot conclude this part of my subject without specifying one remarkable class of circumstances which evince the indebtedness of Christianity to the Jews. It must never be forgotten that all the thirty-nine books of the Old Testament were written by Jewish hands; nay, more, that all the twenty-seven books of the New Testament, with the exception of two, were written by Jews. Let us try to weigh the importance of this fact. Where, to-day, do we find all the doctrines, precepts, and promises bound up with Christianity? It is in that book which we call the Old and New Testaments. That book, as is well known, has been scattered by tens of millions over the world, and never more so than at the present hour. Christianity is unques-

tionably spread by means of that book, and yet almost the entire volume has been prepared by Jews. Who therefore shall estimate the obligation which Christianity undeniably owes to these Jewish hands? What aid, I ask, is there which Christianity enjoys for its propagation to-day compared with what it receives from those Jewish hands, which have furnished it with so much of the book through which life is communicated to the world?

What a solemn consideration for us Gentiles it is, that all these valuable reasons for obligation to Jews could not counterbalance the guilt of their rejection of Jesus, the Son of God! Yes; you may be the instruments of benefit to others to an entirely unexpected degree! What if you fail to receive Christ as a Saviour for yourself? All will prove ineffectual for your own salvation, and you will be lost.

II.

One important benefit which Christians obtain from the Old Testament ritual, that wondrous ceremonial law that was given to Israel alone, is that in it we find the most vivid illustration of some of the vital doctrines of Christianity, and indeed we owe to it our clearest ideas regarding them.

One of these vital doctrines is, that we are to be saved by the interposition, indeed by the substitution,

of another; and that man cannot be delivered from his sins by any works or doings or sufferings of his own, but only through the intervention of a great deliverer.

Here I may mention wherein we Christians and our Jewish brethren agree, and wherein we differ, on the subject of the Messiah.

Both Jews and Christians agree that our hope is to be placed in a promised Messiah, as it is written, “In thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed.”

Again, Jews and Christians agree in holding that the promised Messiah should be a conquering and reigning Messiah; but then we differ in this, that whereas our Jewish brethren look only for a conquering and reigning Messiah, we Christians consider and believe from the Scriptures that, in order to the Great Deliverer being a conquering and reigning Messiah, He must, in the first place, be a *suffering* Messiah.

In the twelve verses which comprise the well-known fifty-third chapter of Isaiah, the Messiah, who is there described as the servant of the Lord, is set forth no less than twelve times as a suffering Messiah; and as suffering not for His own sins, but for the sins of others. I allow that, towards the conclusion of that chapter, He is set forth as a conquering and reigning Messiah, for God says of Him, “Therefore will I divide him a portion with the

great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong ;" but this is after the statement, so amply given, of His being a suffering Messiah.

Let me now call your attention to one remarkable illustration of the doctrine of substitution, for which I myself feel especially grateful to the Jewish ceremonial law. I refer to that, perhaps the most peculiar, ritual service of ancient Israel, viz., the great Day of Atonement, celebrated once a year, and described in chapter xvi. of the third book of Moses. On that day two goats were employed, one of which was to be slain, and its blood carried by the high priest on that one day, alone, into the Holiest of all, and seven times to be sprinkled on the ground before the Ark and the glory between the Cherubim. That part of the ceremonial represented the manner of atonement made for sin, viz., by the death of a substitute.

But now, let me call your special notice to what was done with the other goat.

When the high priest had made an end of reconciling the holy place and the tabernacle of the congregation and the altar, by the shedding and sprinkling of blood, the other goat was brought to him, and then the high priest solemnly laid, not one hand merely, as was customary in the sacrifices, but both his hands, on the head of the goat, in order more emphatically to convey the idea of transference of guilt to the head of the goat ; and, having done so,

he confessed over the animal all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions in all their sins, that is, all their sins and all the aggravations of their sins, putting them upon the head of the goat. Thereafter, the animal was led away by the hand of a fit and especially selected man into the wilderness, never to be seen or heard of any more.

What was the meaning of this remarkable arrangement?

The high priest's hands, being laid on the goat's head while the confession of all Israel's sins was made over it, symbolized the transference of the high priest's sins and those of all the people to the goat. Indeed, the import of his procedure is distinctly expressed by the words, “*Putting them on the head of the goat.*” Now, let me ask you, “Did that tremendous transference of sins cause any inconvenience to the goat? Was the creature burdened by the load of sins laid on it?” Not at all. All these sins had less weight for the animal than the smallest feather dropped from the sparrow's wing, had it been found and placed on its head. And how was this? *Because the sins were, after all, not real sins, but only the shadows of sins;* and we know that no amount of shadows can produce any weight.

Then, as for the goat itself, it was but a little four-footed kid; and can we suppose for a moment that the tremendous mass of sins laid on its head

could be carried away by a little animal, the like of which was every day slain for food among many of the families of Israel? What! all the mountains of Israel's iniquities removed into the land of forgetfulness by a little four-footed animal? Impossible! "It is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins."¹ The goat was, after all, but the shadow of the true sin-bearer. The sins were shadowy sins, and the four-footed deliverer was but the shadow of the true deliverer. The whole was but a typical service. But then the day was to come when not shadowy sins, but the real sins,—sins in all their magnitude, multitude, aggravation, and hatefulness,—were to be laid upon the head, not of a shadowy, but of a real substitute; one who was able to receive and bear them all. Who was the real substitute? That real substitute we find set forth in a remarkable passage of the Word of God, in the Prophet Isaiah, chapter liii., verse 6: "All we, like sheep, have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and *the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.*"

The one goat, with all Israel's sins on its head, led away into the wilderness, symbolically represented the complete forgiveness of the sins; while the death and sprinkling of the blood of the other goat, which had preceded the leading off of the second goat, signified the manner, or means, in

¹ Heb. x. 4.

which atonement for sin was to be made, namely, by the death of the substitute.

This real substitute, who bore the awful burden of those real sins, we Christians believe to be the Messiah. Who but one that was *Divine* could have undertaken or accomplished a work so stupendous as this ?

III.

Testimony as to the future of the Jews, according to the New and as founded on the Old Testament Scriptures.

One subject which invests the future of the Jews with peculiar interest for all Bible-instructed Christians, is what the sacred books of the New Testament tell us is in store for the Jews.

The passage which chiefly deals with this important theme you will find in chapter xi. of the Epistle to the Romans.

Into the exposition of that chapter I do not enter now, further than to say that while it affirms distinctly the glorious gathering home of Israel in days to come, it also sets before us the beneficent effect of Israel's return on the nations of the world. In language of peculiar force and beauty, the apostolic writer shows that, if on the one hand, those whom he calls the Gentiles experienced so much blessing at the time when the Gospel failed to receive acceptance from the Jews, on the other hand, when the Jews shall, as he tells us they will,

be gathered home, the blessing which the nations in connection with that event will receive will be no less than as *life from the dead!*

At the present hour, the Churches among the nations are languid and dead enough; but, when Israel shall be restored, it will be no less like a resurrection from the dead to the nations of the Gentiles. When the ingathering of Israel shall take place, we infer from the words of the sacred writer that the event will be national, for he expressly intimates, "*And so all Israel shall be saved.*"

All this I briefly notice to remove the impression that the inbringing of Israel from among all nations can be anything else but a boon to the nations of the world. No wonder that we should ardently long for their gathering home, and cherish towards them the kindest and warmest feelings! Their bringing home will be as life to the world!

It has often been maintained by intelligent Christians that the Jews are so firmly attached to their own views that there is no hope of their ever renouncing them; but the apostolic writer referred to, throws an important light on this subject. As to the difficulty hitherto experienced, he tells us that Israel has been shut up, as it were, by a wall—that wall of unbelief. Now this wall of unbelief has lasted for ages, but it shall not always be so. The day is coming when that wall shall be thrown down,

and then, as has already been said, “All Israel shall be saved.” It will be as at Jericho, when at the sound of the trumpets of rams’ horns, the walls suddenly fell down, and all Israel, marching over its ruins, took possession of the great city, the firstfruits of the Lord’s promised inheritance; but with this great difference, viz., that when the wall of unbelief, within which Israel has been shut up, shall fall down, Israel shall march forth over its ruins to enter on the glorious liberty of the children of God, and assist in the securing for its Messiah that other and grander inheritance promised in the words, “I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession.”¹

There are considerations of weighty character bearing upon the case of Israel on which I do not consider it expedient to enter at this time. This only I will say, and it is in harmony with all I have uttered, that, in the day of Israel’s ingathering, *that great sin*, ay, the greatest of all sins, which we Christians hold to have been committed more or less in ignorance by the family of Israel, and which has brought down on the Jews the calamities of eighteen centuries, shall be repented of. That repentance will be followed by a forgiveness so vast and complete as to find its description in these memorable words of the Prophet Jeremiah, “In

¹ Psalm ii. 8.

those days, and in that time, saith the LORD, the iniquity of Israel shall be sought for, and there *shall be none*; and the sins of Judah, and they shall *not be found*: for I will pardon them whom I reserve."¹ Then will that atoning blood, which has been shed ages ago, vindicate its unspeakable, its transcendent efficacy, by cleansing away and annihilating the guilt of its own shedding.

IV.

CONCLUSION.

The necessity of a well-grounded hope for the future.

It is not my intention in this lecture to set forth the doctrines peculiar to Christianity, and to urge their acceptance on my Jewish brethren. I would say this, that certainly it must be of the utmost importance for us all that we should have a good and sure hope for that eternal future which stands so near to us. What is our condition to-day before God? How are those enormous sins, with which every man and every woman is chargeable, to be pardoned and to be put away? Have you thought of this? Have our sins been forgiven? If not, when are they to be forgiven? and how? Is it enough for us to say, as I heard a Jewess say the other day, "We merely trust in the mercy of God"? I know that many who call themselves Christians

¹ Jer. l. 20.

are without any sure ground of hope. They are only Christians in name—that is all. But to have a *sure foundation* on which to stand in the prospect of meeting God is surely of unspeakable moment. Can I, a sinner, to-day die in peace? How hapless is uncertainty on this most serious of personal problems!

Some time ago, while at St. Petersburg, I happened to visit a gallery of sculpture and painting. I remember being struck with the appearance of one exquisite piece of art; it was the representation, in snow-white marble, of a young man of faultless form and most engaging expression. He was in full court dress, and had a violin under his left arm. He was obviously a musician, and was hurrying to some place of entertainment, probably in the Imperial Palace, where his music was expected. But, though the eyeballs of the young man were beautifully chiselled, he was evidently blind. In his right hand he grasped the upper fragment of a slender staff, with which he had been feeling his way, but which by some accident, probably by his tripping in his haste, had snapped near its upper extremity, leaving only the top of it in his hand. The longer portion of the staff had fallen, and was lying at a little distance behind him, while he in his blindness was unable to discover where it was. The sculptor's genius was evinced by the air of consternation and confusion depicted in the attitude and features

of the young musician. He was plainly afraid lest he should mistake his way, stumble down a staircase, or fall into the river, which was silently flowing past the palatial residences. He could not go back, he could not go forward ; he stood, the very picture, in marble, of irresolution and dismay.

What a sad thing for us not to know whither we are going, or what is to become of us, and to find ourselves on the brink of eternity without a sure hope !

In the marble of the sculptor, the broken staff, which might still have guided the hapless youth, was lying behind, and, had he turned and stooped, was quite within reach ; but his blindness prevented his discovering it.

Ah ! we have a rod, the rod of the Divine Word, lying by us, and close to our hand. If that rod be discovered and grasped, it will lead us with certainty and safety on our way to the eternal world. I have found that rod, and have known it to be a sure and trustworthy guide for me. It is no other than the Word of the living God, the Gospel of salvation, the Gospel of Divine grace, which makes known the only means by which sin is put away. What better thing can I wish than that all that hear me should become partakers of the blessed hope which I myself have found ?

In the city where I live, my house stands on a hill, and sometimes in my solitary walk homewards,

late in a clear and wintry night, I turn my eyes towards the firmament above me, twinkling with lights, or should I not say all ablaze with innumerable stars. Southward, but now sloping towards the western horizon, strides Orion with his "bands," his well-known diamond belt,—Orion, the most majestic constellation in either hemisphere, with Betelgeux glittering on his shoulder, and Rigel sparkling on his knee, while Sirius, brightest of fixed stars, flames at his feet. Above him are Aldebaran and the Pleiades with their "sweet influences." Right above me is Auriga, the cheerful waggoner, with Capella, the pretty little goat, on his shoulder. And not far off Procyon, and the twin stars Castor and Pollux. To the north-west Cassiopeia sits in her chair, and near her Lyra, with golden strings; and beautiful Vega, its chief ornament, makes us wish to hear the music of the spheres. To the east rises the Lion, rampant in the sky, with fiery Regulus blazing at its heart; and northwards the constellation of the Great Bear, wheeling round the Pole; while near, ruddy Arcturus is keeping his watch. All these, with one or more of the unflickering planets, visible among the constellations, constitute a charming yet overwhelming sight.

I have at times given rein to my fancy, and imagined that these bright orbs suddenly changed their places and rearranged themselves in new

groups, that the stars took the form of letters of the alphabet, that the letters framed themselves into words, and that the words arranged themselves so as to constitute a sentence, and that such a sentence as this were drawn in letters of light across the expanse of heaven: "*Verily,—verily,—I—say—unto—you,—He—that—believeth—on—me—hath—everlasting—life.*"

Were such a thing to take place, what astonishment would seize the beholder! How eagerly would each passenger scan the firmament! The learned professors of the ancient University, near which my dwelling is, would be seen hastening down with their optical instruments, adjusting their astronomical glasses on the terrace, and pointing them upwards. Such of the citizens and youths as were still awake would direct their trembling fingers to the sky, and exclaim, "Look! look! God is speaking to us in words made up of stars! He is calling us to believe on His Son for our salvation. See! Read the flaming characters: '*Verily,—verily,—I—say—unto—you,—He—that—believeth—on—me—hath—everlasting—life.*'"

Friends, we shall never witness these words drawn in starlight athwart the forehead of the heavens; but, though we cannot read these words there, we may read them where the pen of inspiration has recorded them—on the page of this blessed book.

For myself, I am free to say these words as written there are as sure to me as if they were visible night after night on the face of the sky ; nay, they are, if possible, more sure ; for has not He whose august lips uttered them, Himself declared, " HEAVEN — AND — EARTH — SHALL — PASS — AWAY, — BUT — MY — WORDS — SHALL — NOT — PASS — AWAY " ?

